北山結莉
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2
精霊の祝福
精霊幻想記
【せいれいげんそうき】

Illustrations

ラティーファは涙を浮かべて、
リオの胸元に顔をうずめている。
すっぽりとリオの胸元に収まる小さな身体、
そして、陶器のように真っ白な肌は、
とてもはかなくて、触れれば
壊れてしまいそうなほどに脆そうで――。

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Chapter 13
Wanted

After having spent a night at the Royal Institute, Rio slipped away in the morning and headed towards the market to gather necessities for his journey.
Until now, he had rarely ever left the Royal Institute.
The streets of the royal capital had not changed much since the time he spent there as an orphan.

However, now was not the time to be immersed in nostalgia.
He needed to finish his preparations and escape from the capital as soon as possible.
The Royal Institute uniform he still wore stook out like a sore thumb admist the crowd.
He had already cut off the Royal Institute crest and disposed of it.
Nevertheless, because it was common knowledge that only nobles attended the Royal Institute, whenever he came across a patrolling guard, they would stop and salute.
Commoners also kept their distance and gave him a wide berth.

Incidentally, for the past several days, Rio had not ingested anything except water and as a result, his stomach growled loudly from hunger.
He desperately needed something to fill his stomach as well as a change of clothes. At any rate, for the last five years, all his needs were fulfilled within the Royal Institute.
He came to the market in search for clothes and daily necessities, however upon arrival, it dawned him that he had no idea where the clothing shops were.
Wandering aimlessly for a time, he finally arrived at a marketplace located off the main street.

At that time, an alluring aroma drifted into his nose stimulating his

appetite.
The market was overflowing with street vendors.
One of the stalls was the source of the aroma.
Since the stall was located off to the side, it had few customers.

（I'll buy something from there and ask where I can find a clothing shop.）

Rio headed towards the stall while thinking as such.
A young girl was tending to the stall but due to the lack of customers, she looked bored.
A woman who appeared to be the girl's mother was busy working on something behind her.

「Ah, welcome!」

When Rio approached the stall, the girl noticed him and enthusiastically welcomed him.
She was probably around seven or eight years old?
The sweet little girl possessed chestnut coloured hair, a prevalent hair colour in the kingdom.
Although she was a little on the thin side, she was lovely girl.
When the girl noticed Rio's clothing, her expression turned into one of surprise and panic.

「Ah, uhm… that…」

Judging from the uniform Rio wore, she assumed he was a noble.
The girl became incredibly nervous.
It was public knowledge that nobles were extremely prejudiced towards commoners and often treated them violently.
She was most likely told by her parents to be wary of nobles.

「It's alright, you don't have to be so nervous. I came over here because I'm slightly hungry and smelled something good. What do you sell here?」

The girl becomes relieved at Rio's soothing tone.

「Uhm let's see, we have grilled meat and vegetables with sauce in a bun, desu.」

Rio smiled gently seeing the girl trying her best to use polite speech.

「A— Ara, oh my, what brings noble-sama to our humble stall?」

The girl's mother who was busy with food preparations finally noticed Rio.
Appearing before him was a beautiful young woman.
She seemed to have mistaken Rio as a noble judging from his appearance.

「I'm sorry for surprising you. I was lured by the pleasant smell from this stall. Since I'm quite hungry can I ask for two orders?」
「But… uhm… I'm afraid our humble stall's food may not be able to live up to noble-sama's palate…」

The girl's mother spoke in an grateful yet troubled tone.
She did not know what might happen if a noble ate her food and then shouted how it was unpalatable.
She was afraid of the consequences.

「Don't worry. I'm accustomed with common food. I won't do something like trying to find faults in your cooking.」

Rio lightly bowed his head in order to assure the girl's mother.
Seeing how sincere he acted, the girl's mother wariness faded.
Incidentally, this was the first time Rio bought food from a street vendor.

「Then, it'll be 20 copper for two orders. Do you know how to eat it?」

She was worried because nobles rarely ever used their hands to eat.
They always took their meals using spoons, forks, and knives.

「Thank you very much. I know how to eat this so it's alright. Here, please keep the change.」
Rio handed over a silver coin.
As the mother frantically searched for change, he told her it was unnecessary.

「But this much is…」

「Please accept it, and give your daughter something good to eat.」

Rio looked at the girl and gave her a light smile.

「Still…」
「Alright, then can you please tell me where I can find clothing, weapon, and armour shops in exchange? It's a embarrassing but I'm a bit lost.」

Rio smiled bashfully as he spoke.
Seeing his behaviour, the girl's mother faltered for a second before letting out a small laugh.

「Of course. If you're looking for a place selling brand new clothes, you can find a large shop on the main street. Head straight down that way until you meet the main street and then take a left. It should take less than a minute before you arrive at the clothing shop which will be on your right. The weapons and armour shops should be close by as well.」
「I see. You saved me. Thank you very much.」

Rio lightly bowed his head.
The girl's mother also returned a bow and returned to her cooking.

「Here you go.」

He was presented with a long piece of rye bread resembling a hot dog bun. Meat and vegetables were stuffed in the opening.
Rio stuffed the sandwich into his mouth with accustomed movements.
The next moment, the flavourful taste of meat juices and salted sauce assaulted his taste buds.

「Mmm, delicious.」

With a satisfied smile, Rio gave his impression of the sandwich.
Hearing his impression, the girl's mother sighed in relief.

Despite using top quality ingredients for their meals, the food served in the Royal Institute could not even compare to this sandwich.
The difference lay in the skill of the chef.
He grew nostalgic remembering how he used to buy fast food in his

former life. The seasoning used was superb.

Rio finished the two sandwiches in the blink of an eye, and after bidding the girl and her mother farewell, started heading towards the shops he asked about before.
As he approached the main street, the surroundings grew more lively and eventful.
He passed large crowds of people as he made his way towards his destination.
Unlike within the castle walls, the roads here were not paved revealing the bare soil.

（Hm?）

Suddenly, Rio felt someone’s gaze on his back and stopped in his tracks.
Despite trying to find the owner of the gaze, there were simply too many people around him.

（Is it just my imagination?）

Becoming uneasy, Rio picked up his pace.
Walking for approximately another minute, he found the shops he was looking for.
They were located in two buildings, each three stories tall.
He entered the shops, quickly picking up the thing he needed, and completed his shopping in 30 minutes.

After Rio finished changing his clothes, he looked no different from an ordinary adventurer.
A one-handed sword hung from his hip, two daggers, a quiver slung across his back, a hooded black long coat, an olive green cloth armour shirt underneath, and brown light leather armour.
Concealed in his coat were several throwing knives.
Furthermore, he carried a bow and rucksack on his back.
Packed in his rucksack were spare underwear, socks, and a thick blanket.
Some space still remained for food and other necessities.
He chose his gear on the basis of stealth and practicality.
Although for a boy of his age, it would be highly unusual for them to be able to afford such gear.

「Oi.」

As Rio was about to head out to take care of a few remaining things, a thug-like man called out to him.

「What is it?」
「You, could it be that you're Rio?」

While rudely inspecting Rio from head to toe, the man questioned him.
Rio turned his gaze towards the man.
With just a glance, Rio knew this was the person who was stalking him from before.

「…No, you must be mistaken. Now if you'd excuse me, I'm in a hurry.」

Although he was curious as to how the man knew his name, he did not like the look of the man's eyes and tried to get away from him in a hurry.

「Well, just wait a minute. Just now, a wanted poster for a black-haired kid named Rio was posted. Not even an hour has passed yet. Informers are quick at noticing these kinds of notices. And yet, the guards haven't been notified yet.」

The man forcibly placed himself in front of Rio and began boasting about his acute senses.
Rio was forced to stop as a result.

「But then as I'm walking down to the market looking for something to eat, I find a black-haired kid walking along. There's no way I'm not going to call out to him.」

With a vulgar smile, the man took a step closer to Rio and glared down at him with widened eyes.

「What are you talking about? 」
「Don't play dumb. There aren't many black-haired kids around here. Besides, although you were wearing the Royal Institute uniform just a while ago, you changed into traveller's clothes to make your escape. You're Rio, aren't you?」

The man was glaring at Rio from point black range.
Although he did not believe Rio's protest, he acted overly-familiar, persistently pestering and clinging onto him.

「Enough, you're awfully stubborn. I thought I said I was in a hurry?」

Mixing anger and bloodthirst into his words, Rio coldly glared at the man.

「W— Wa— Wait, wait! Don't panic. Guards will coming running over if I shout. There are guards all around us.」

The man faltered and took a step back at Rio's bloodthirst.

「Even if you're not Rio, the guards won't believe you. Aren't you worried? Right? The guards you passed before before will remember you had black hair.」

Speaking increasingly rapidly, the words coming out of the man's mouth started sounding more like a threat.

「……」

Rio stared at the man in silence.
Judging from Rio's indifference and his previous reaction, the man became increasingly convinced in his deduction.

「Hehe, and if you're Rio, let alone escaping from the kingdom, you won't even make it out of the capital. News of about you has already spread all over the kingdom through the magic communication tool.」

The man carefully observed Rio for any reactions, yet Rio's poker face did not falter.

The magic communication tool resembled a device capable of video calls[11]; it was an artifact recovered from ancient times.
It had a maximum range of 30 kilometres.
On top of being formidably expensive, they were also incredibly rare.
However, one was installed in every city.
Therefore, cities were often established within 30 kilometres of each other.

「Che, you won't bite huh? Well, fine then. You seem to be wealthy.

You have money right?」

（Ah… so it’s blackmail huh?）

Finally understanding the man’s aim, Rio’s mind instantly turned cold.

It was unknown whether Rio was dead or alive, but it was highly likely he was considered dead.
That was why he never considered the possibility of being placed on a wanted list.
He wondered if he would be executed if caught alive. Considering his crime was attempted murder of a member of the royal family, it was highly likely.
Either way, he was framed for a crime he did not commit despite being the victim.
It came as no surprise that he no longer trusted anybody.
As expected, anger welled up within him when he recalled incident.
His heart was gradually being eroded.
Suddenly, he had an urge to take out his frustration on the man in front of him.

「Well, how about you lend me some money? You must have gold since you attended the Royal Institute right? You were also able to afford all that equipment. In exchange, I’ll give you a place to hide. What do you say?」

The man spoke calmly, wholeheartedly believing he had the upperhand.

Even if Rio handed over some money now, the man would probably continue extorting him.
After that, he would probably turn in Rio to the guards for the bounty.
That was what Rio speculated.

「Hahaha…」

For reasons unknown, Rio bursted into laughter.
The man furrowed his eyebrows.

「Ah? Why are you laughing? Are you touched by my kindness?」

Ignoring the man’s words, Rio continued laughing.

If he did not start laughing, he may have lost all self-control.
After having laughed for a while, his expression became solemn and he opened his mouth.

「No, it's nothing. I'm not Rio. If you're trying to blackmail this Rio fellow, then I don't have time to listen to your crap. See ya.」

Telling the man that, Rio turned his back on him and began walking away.
He wondered how the man would react, but he thought his answer was satisfactory.
The man was stunned for an instant, but anger took over immediately afterwards.

「Oi! This guy is a wanted person! Guards! Over here!」

The man shouted in a loud voice while simultaneously reaching out to restrain Rio.
At that moment, Rio grabbed the man's outreached hand and pulling it, threw him onto his face.

「Gah… guh.」

A dull voice leaked out of the man who was not able to perform Ukemi[12].
Rio proceeded to twist the fallen man's arm.
A dull cracking sound could be heard but Rio's expression did not change in the slightest.
The nearby guards who witnessed the scuffle shouted at Rio to stop.
However, Rio ignored them and dashed away, making his way out of the capital.

* * *

That evening, in a certain room of Duke Euguno's residence in the noble district, Duke Euguno, who sat on an exquisitely decorated chair, looked down at a girl dressed in a ragged robe.
The girl had straight, orange hair that extended down to her back.
Her age had not even reached 10 yet.

On her head were a pair of fox ears; a fox tail could be seen sticking out of her skirt under her robe.
The girl belonged to the beastman tribe of the fox race.

Most demi-humans including the beastmen tribe did not live in human territory.
In the first place, demi-humans rarely appeared in human held territory.
Demi-human slaves were incredibly valuable because officially, it was illegal to hunt for demi-human slaves due to the risk of retaliation.

Among the demi-human slaves, beastmen were treated the worst.
Since they were half human and half beast, many humans regarded their existence as filthy and looked down on them.
It was an open secret that many nobles had the hobby of keeping beastmen slaves.
Despite being regarded as a filthy existence, many nobles enjoyed raising them as pets.
They truly believed they were justified in doing so.

The girl's mother was a beastman.
She was unfortunately caught by humans during a slave hunt near her village.
The girl's mother was subsequently bought by Duke Euguno.
The mother was forced to bear a child at the age of 15 and died at the tender age of 20.
The Duke Euguno sitting before the girl was the girl's father.
Stead was the girl's half brother.

The girl was treated harshly.
The moment she reached an age of understanding, she was trained[l 3l] and disciplined. Traces of countless lashes could be seen all over her body.
Stead treated her as his toy, routinely violating her[l 4l]; the other day he blundered horribly and used her as a target to vent his frustration.
Furthermore, Duke Euguno had her undergo combat training.

Compared to the human race, beastmen possessed much higher physical abilities.

Their five senses were also superior. For example, the beastmen fox race were on par with the beastmen dog race's excellent sense of smell.
Although it would be difficult to use her as a frontline soldier, she made an excellent combat puppet.
Whenever a human and a beastman interbred, the child would inherit only one parent's characteristics. Incidentally, the girl was born a pure beastman.

「This is the assassination target's clothes. Remember the smell.」

Duke Euguno threw the clothes at the girl.

「Understood.」

Giving a brief affirmation, the girl pressed her nose against the clothes and memorised the odour.

「You are forbidden to die. But make sure to kill him even if you have to fight to death. This is the only reason I've bothered raising you. Use your appearance as a child to catch him off guard and kill him. Remember that as long as you have that collar, you cannot escape. Go.」
「I… understand…」

Nodding, the frightened girl stammered her response.
Although she could hold minimal daily conversations, she never received formal education.

The girl's eyes held no light in them.
Instead, a magic stone fitted in her collar emitted a dull glow.

The girl pulled her hood over her head and left the room as commanded.
Upon exiting the mansion, she began chasing the faint, yet still lingering smell of her target.
The girl started running and before long, left the capital.

Notes

1. Think Apple FaceTime or Skype video call
2. Judo falling technique
3. Like how you would train an animal/pet
4. Does not indicate rape

Chapter 14

Trading City, Almond

Currently, Rio was running through the forest in the direction of the Bertram Kingdom's national border.
Two days had passed since his escape from the capital.

During that time he continued to move on foot.
As for the average distance he covered, by adjusting the distance he covered in the forest to that of the highway[11], it amounted to approximately 30 kilometres every 8 hours[12].
However, by strengthening his body and physical abilities, Rio was able to cover over 300 kilometres a day.
As such, unless his pursuers made their horses sprint without rest, it would be impossible to overtake him.
At the current rate, he would be able to cross the border by the end of the day.

Situated along the eastern border of Bertram kingdom was its ally, the Galark Kingdom.
Not only did the Galark Kingdom boast a proud history and national power on par with the Bertram Kingdom, it was also one of the powerhouses of the Yufila continent.

(If I'm lucky, news of my escape will not have reached the Galark Kingdom…)

As a result of becoming a fugitive on the run, Rio was unable to procure a sufficient amount of food.
In the worst case, if news about his fugitive status had already reached the Galark Kingdom, he would have to escape into the wilderness area without any food.

It should be noted that the wilderness area referred to an area in which humanity's influence did not reach.

It was in this area that Elves, Dwarves, Beastmen, and other demi-humans resided.
There was virtually no contact between the humans and demi-humans. If anything, the two groups were openly hostile to each other.
Rio's destination was Yagumo which lay to the east of the wilderness area.
Periodical means of transportation to Yagumo did not exist. At most, official correspondence between the two nations occurred once every few decades.

There were three possible routes to get to Yagumo: via land, sea, or air.

As the land route was the only viable option, it was inevitable that Rio would have to pass through the demi-human's territory.
A detailed map of the forest did not exist and the terrain included many trees and mountains making it difficult to traverse on foot. In the worst case scenario, he could stumble upon a habitat full of dangerous creatures or monsters.
While planning out his route, Rio's speed decreased greatly. He realised it would take at least two months until he arrived at his destination.

The sea route followed the shoreline but because its speed largely depended on cooperative weather, the route also took a considerable amount of time.
Moreover, numerous highly dangerous monsters inhabited the sea including the Sea Serpent, a dragon subspecies.
Therefore, if one became careless, the risks of the sea route were far higher than the route by land. The monetary cost was also unrealistic given the risks.

That left the air route which was the safest of the three.
There existed ancient artefacts called Magic Ships which were capable of flying in the air.
Boasting an average speed of 40 kilometres per hour, it was also considerably easier to defend against monsters than at sea.
However, the number of Magic Ships were extremely limited and they consumed a large amount of magic stones as fuel.

There were also a small handful of people who were capable of flight allowing them to freely use the route by air.

Of course taking into account the cost and safety of each route, there was only one realistic choice for Rio.
That was the land route.
If he had a choice, he would not choose the land route because of the dangers described earlier but his current situation did not allow him such luxuries.

Nevertheless, Rio was determined to head towards Yagumo. While the name “Yagumo” reminded him of his former life as Amakawa Haruto and aroused his interest, his main motivation was that it was his parent’s home town.
A grave for his parents did not exist in the Bertram Kingdom, therefore he wished to erect one for them in Yagumo.
That was Rio’s resolve.

In addition, it would also serve to ease one of his worries.
The desire to avenge his mother still raged within him, but his other self was reluctant about revenge.
As a result of his clashing personalities, Rio was unsure as to what he should do.
That is why, if he could not come to terms with himself after holding a funeral for his parents, he would track down his mother’s murderer and settle it then.
Although he did know where his target resided, according to the information he managed to gather from the Adventurer’s Guild during his time at the Royal Institute, the man seemed to lead a rather well-known mercenary band and frequently travelled between countries.
If he paid a visit to the Adventurer’s Guild in each region he passed, there was a chance he would meet his target.
While thinking over the matter, he unconsciously applied partial body body and physical reinforcement and explosively accelerated his run.

The highway cut across the plains, avoiding mountainous regions and forest.
Although the highway could not be considered absolutely safe, areas with little to no human activity were teeming with monsters and wild animals.

If one was prepared to deal with these monsters, they could cross the border without ever setting foot on the highway.
Considering the fact that he was a fugitive of the run, it was obvious Rio could not cross the border via the regular route.
There were only a few low ranked monsters in his path so other than the ones that could keep up with him, he ran past and ignored all the monsters he encountered.
According to the sign he saw when he briefly returned to the highway to regain his bearings, he was quickly closing in on the border.

The Bertram Kingdom stretched horizontally while the Galark Kingdom extended vertically[3].
If he were to continue on his current course, he estimated it would take about two days to cross the border into the Galark Kingdom. However, he would end up in the wilderness area.
If he was not put on the Galark Kingdom's wanted list yet, then he needed to restock his food supply and other necessities at a city.
And as promised, he also wanted to send a letter to Seria.

Time became a blur and it already became afternoon.
He needed to find a suitable place to set up camp soon if he could not find a city.
Needing to check if he had already entered the Galark Kingdom, Rio headed towards the highway.

After several minutes of walking, the forest opened up to reveal the highway.
The width of the road was approximately 10 metres allowing for up to three carriages to travel side-by-side.
Looking ahead, he could see smoke rising and faintly make out the shape of city.
By pure luck, he was already near a city.

Confirming neither people nor wagons were nearby, Rio broke into a quick run.
He should arrive at the town in about an hour.
There he should be able to find out whether he was in the Galark Kingdom or not.

Vast fields of wheat, vegetable gardens, vineyards, pastures, and livestock huts greeted him upon arrival at the edge of city.
Here and there, people could be seen working the land.
Off in the distance, a lake with several wagons gathered around could be seen.

This was the city of Almond, under the jurisdiction of Duke Kretia of the Galark Kingdom.
Although its population was just over 5000, it was a prominent trading post connecting the Bertram and Galark Kingdoms. As a result, the city was always bustling with more people than the official population count.
The city was enclosed by three metre tall stone walls and soldiers stood on guard at the entrances. However in contrast to its appearance, the security checks were lax.

Having arrived at the city, Rio learned that he was not on the Galark Kingdom's wanted list.
For the time being, he felt relieved.
There was also the possibility that the information had just not arrived yet but that chances of that were low considering the existence of the magic communication tool[4].
Even if the news about him were to be known eventually, he would probably still be alright if he did not attract attention.

Numerous shops and stalls lined the street when he entered the city.
Armour, magic tools, cooking ingredients, clothes, furniture, accessories, potions, and general goods of various qualities could be seen.
The residents were overflowing with vigor and lively voices could be heard everywhere.
He had time to do a bit of sightseeing thanks to arriving earlier than expected.
It was impossible for Rio to ignore the rich smell of food after being on the run for so long.
Besides the simple sandwich he had in the morning, he had done nothing but run for the majority of the day without eating.
Rio turned towards a street vendor selling grilled beef skewers.

「Oji-san[5], is Bertram Kingdom money accepted here?」

What concerned Rio the most at the moment was if the money he brought with him was usable.
He assumed that money from the neighbouring kingdom would accepted but wanted to make sure nonetheless.

「Oh, don't ya know lad? The Merchant's Guild is the one responsible for issuing and regulating money for each country. That's why as long as a country establishes a Merchant's Guild, they'll use the same currency.」

（Hee~ So a common international currency is already established even with this world's level of civilization.）

It seemed Rio's fear was needless.
He was both relieved and in admiration of the convenience.

「I see, this is the first time I've heard of that. Please give me five of those then.」
「Here ya go!」

Handing over 25 copper coins, he received the five grilled beef skewers.
The seasoning was simple, solely consisting of salt, but it stimulated his appetite regardless.
To the famished Rio, it could be said to be highest grade of seasoning.
Although it was slightly chewy and nowhere near the quality of meat nobles ate, the five skewers disappeared into his stomach in no time.

「You eat heartily, lad!」
「Of course since it's delicious. By the way Oji-san, could you tell me a bit about this country? I only arrived recently.」

The Oji-san gave him an understanding look.

「Lad, you give off them adventurer vibes. Even though ya seem like quite the brat, yer actually polite. Alright, leave it to me!」

Despite using an easy-to-approach way of speaking, it seemed the Oji-san was still able to perceive his polite tone.
Perhaps it was because many aspiring adventurers around his age

usually displayed a haughty attitude.
The Oji-san began cheerfully talking to Rio.
It appeared that he had quite the talkative personality.
The Galark and Bertram Kingdoms shared an alliance to oppose their old enemy, the Proxia Empire. However, they were currently stuck in a stalemate. The current hot topic was however the love affairs of the Galark Kingdom's royal family, not that Rio cared.

「…and as for this city, there's Duke Kretia's daughter, the most talented woman in the Galark Kingdom, Liselotte-sama. Lad, have ya ever heard of the meat soup『Men[161]』?」

Hearing the Oji-san's talk, the man from a neighbouring unpopular stall also joined in.
Not forgetting to advertise his own business, the man cleverly inserted himself into the conversation.

「Meat soup『Men』? Hee~ That sounds pretty good too. Then one bowl please.」

Interested in the pronunciation of the name『Men』, Rio decided to order a bowl.
He paid 12 copper coins and waited for it be prepared.

「Why, Aniki. I think we need to have a lil' chat after this.」

The Oji-san who was talking to Rio had his customer stolen and displayed a sullen expression.

「Hehe, well he's kinda like me younger brother. Anyways, this meat soup『Men』was devised by Liselotte-sama. Here ya go, thanks for waiting!」

Apparently, the two men were siblings.
Looking at the bowl placed in front of him, Rio froze.

「This is…」

What appeared strongly resembled Soup Pasta.
There was no doubt about it, the ingredients were only vegetables and meat.

「Was this conceived by the duke's daughter?」
「Yup. To be exact, that is『Men』but the preparation's a bit different. It's a type of『Men』called 『Pasta』.」
「This『Men』…『Pasta』… 『Men』,『Noodles[17]』. I see…」

Rio muttered under his breath in understanding.
It was not a word from this world.

He began eating to ascertain the taste.
It was juicy, and judging from the texture on his tongue, it seemed to be made from fresh pasta, not the preserved dried kind.
The seasoning was simply salt.
If garlic, Hawk Claw Chilli[18], pepper, consomme, and olive oil were used in the seasoning, it would lean more towards Rio's preferences.

（It'd be good if I can get some dried noodles for my journey. And rice… can't be found here so I guess barley will have to do as a substitute.）

「These aren't dry『Noodles』? Do you by any chance have them dried?」

If fresh pasta was possible, then creating dried noodles should not be very difficult.
Thinking so, Rio inquired at once.

「Oh! There are dried 『Noodles』made for exporting. If yer looking to buy some, head to a shop managed by the Rikka Firm. It's under the direct management of Liselotte-sama. But lad, could it be that ya already knew of these『Noodles』?」
「Oh no, this is the first time I've had them. It's just that it's really good so I thought it'd be nice if I could have them everyday.」
「Hou~ You like it that much eh? Hehe, as expected of Liselotte-sama!」

The two brothers proclaimed with satisfied expressions.

「Liselotte-sama, huh? How amazing is she?」

Interested in the duke's daughter who created this『Pasta』, Rio casually threw the question.

And then, the pair of brothers began recounting all her achievements.

It was said, that she successfully graduated from the Falark Kingdom Royal Institute while skipping grades.
It was said, that she was a prominent and genius magician of the Galark Kingdom.
It was said, that she spearheaded an agricultural revolution in Duke Kretia's territory.
It was said, the she proposed original cooking recipes that nobody had ever thought of before.
It was said, she introduced a variety of novel forms of entertainment.
It was said, having had her talent recognized, at the tender age of 10, she was entrusted with the management of the city of Almond under Duke Kretia's jurisdiction.
It was said, that she manages the largest business in the city, the Rikka firm from behind the scenes.

And so, Liselotte's various exploits were described.

「I see, she sure is an amazing person.」

Rio muttered in amazement.

「Yup. She doesn't act arrogant to us commoners either. She often comes down to the market for inspections; she even smiled at me the other day.」
「Yer clearly misunderstanding something here. That smile was directed at me.」
「Whatcha say!? I can't ignore what ya just said even if yer Aniki!」

She had already become an idol.
Even though she was said to be only 11 years old, she was apparently quite the beauty.
Rio was still amazed how these two men who were clearly over 30 could say such things about her.

「I can fully comprehend the extent of your love towards Liselotte-sama.」
「Y— Ya idiot! It's not love but admiration!」
「Tha— That's right! The two of us would gladly lay down our lives

for Liselotte-sama!」

Hearing the two desperately trying to explain themselves, Rio could only smile wryly.

「Anyway, other stalls also sell food whose recipes were also created by Liselotte-sama. They're all seriously delicious! My recommendation is the meat『Manjuu[9]』!」

（Meat『Manjuu』huh…? The pronunciation is a bit off but there's no doubt about it.）

She was able to draw up plans that nobody had ever thought of one after another.
A genius; for the people in this world, there was no other word that could describe her, that was what Rio learned about the girl and only Amakawa Haruto understood why.
Using his other self's knowledge, Rio was able to arrive at a conclusion.
『Men』had to be『Noodles』because there did not exist any ingredient in this world quite like it. There was also no dish corresponding to『Meat Bun』or meat『Manjuu』in this world either. The names were obviously taken from the Japanese words『Noodles』and『Meat Bun』.[10]

（The one called Liselotte is a reincarnated person like me. Furthermore, she's also Japanese.）

It was unexpected but Rio found a fellow reincarnator in this different world.

Notes

1. Since he cuts through the forest while the highway winds around, he can cover more distance in the same amount of time.

2. Run for 8 hours, rest for 8 hours, run for 8 hours, etc.

3. Horizontal: East to West; Vertical: North to South.

4. ED: If news hasn't already spread then it's unlikely that it will because news spread using the magic communication tool should be faster than Rio running.

5. Uncle

6. 麺 is read as "men" which means noodles but is written in Katakana as メン here.

7. Noodles here is written in Kanji as 麺.

8. A type of pepper, see Takanotsume.

9. Meat bun, written in Katakana (マンジュー)

10. This was difficult to translate, "Men" and "Manjuu" are written in Katakana while "Noodles" and "Meat Bun" are written in Kanji.

Chapter 15
Rikka Firm

In regards to the girl called Liselotte, it did not seem like she was a bad person judging from her fame and acheievements, but Rio decided it was best to remain inconspicious and restrain himself from asking around.
However, he did not intend on advancing like that.
He was ready give an honest answer if she were to notice that he was a reincarnator but he was reluctant to bring up the topic himself.

（Let's say for example, if we come upon the topic about soup stock, she may take the hint that I'm a reincarnator.）

That might lead into talk about their former world.
Like how they long for their former world.
Even Rio still had lingering feelings for his former world and how he wanted to search for the girl from his childhood.
It was not improper to say that his only regret for not being able to return to Earth was due to his childhood friend.

However, Rio realised that he, who received a new life in this world, did not have a choice to return to his former world.
If he returned, what would happen to the family register? Would he arrive back in the same era? In the first place, was it even possible to return?
Besides, his current appearance was different than that of his past self.
Even if he found a way to return to Earth, these were questions that could not be answered.

Rio had been researching for a way to travel between worlds, but such magic did not exist in this world.
He had scoured the Royal Institute's library and came up empty so it

was doubtful that he would find anything in other countries either.
As a result, Rio had given up hope on finding a way back to Earth.
Regret still lingered within him despite having come to terms with it.
Perhaps it was because he had made no progress in finding his childhood friend back on Earth even when he put all his effort into searching for her that he allowed himself to give up.

Back to the point, a youth with an unknown background like Rio could not possibly demand to meet Liselotte, a noble.
Still, it was possible to run into her by chance.
Instead, he indulged himself with the nostalgic dishes devised by Liselotte as he planned his next course of action.

While continuing to enjoy the nostalgic food, Rio decided to visit the store belonging to the the firm managed by Liselotte in the shadows.
The city's layout was neatly divided and maintained.
The target store entered his view as he approached a line of shops and entered immediately.
It was a large, five story building and was much better maintained than the other stores surrounding it.
He entered through the front door of the store.
It was equally well maintained inside as well.
The interior was furnished using high quality materials. The first floor simply had a counter while the upper floors were used for office space.

（Is my… attire inappropriate for this place?）

Take a quick look around, there was only a single person that looked like merchant standing inside.
Everybody on the first floor were dressed in formal attire causing Rio, who was dressed as an adventurer, to feel extremely out of place.
From behind the counter, a girl around Rio's age approached him with a smile.

「Welcome to the Rikka Firm! How may I assist you?」

From her smile alone, an overflowing sense of grace and amiablity could be felt.
She had long, wavy light blue hair and a lovely and gentle face. He

was able to tell that she was an employee from the uniform she was wearing, but if she wore something like a dress, Rio would have easily mistaken her as a noble's daughter.

「Thank you for the warm welcome. I heard you sell pasta here. If you carry preserved pasta then I'd like to purchase a few and if there are other perishables then I'd like some as well.」

As one would expect from a high class establishment, the staff's conduct was incredibly well mannered. To match, Rio returned an equally polite greeting.
The girl's eyes sparkled in interest as Rio delivered the respectful greeting despite having the appearance of a rugged adventurer.

「Understood. There are the dried noodles variant too.」
「Then those too please. May I know the length of the preservation period?」
「While we have not established a definite amount of time because not even a year has passed since production started, I'm confident that if it's kept in a dry environment at room temperature, it should last for at least two years.」
「I see, then may I hear the price?」
「The price is 15 copper for 500 grams.」

The price was on the higher side for food ingredients in this world.
Still, it was well worth it since it reminded Rio of home.
Well that was not the sole reason why, he was also the type of person who never compromised when it came to food.

「I see. Speaking of which, do you also happen to carry barley?」
「Why yes, of course we do. The price is 10 copper for 1 kilogram.」
「Then can I trouble you to arrange 15 kilograms of pasta and 5 kilograms of barley?」

Although the amount was a bit excessive for only himself, he did not need to carry any water thanks to his Spirit Arts. His body could be strengthened so he could endure the unreasonable weight for the sake of his appetite.
In addition to the other ingredients as well, the total weight would easily surpass 40 kilograms.

「500 grams of pasta is equivalent to six servings, are you sure?」

In total, he bought enough for 180 servings.
Merchants rarely bought small amounts per visit, but never had there been a person to buy this much in a single purchase.
The girl was amazed at Rio who bought such a large quantity of pasta and barley despite having the appearance of an adventurer.
Commoners at his age usually overestimated their strength and were unable to quantify weight well.
Assuming Rio was one of those people, the girl tried explaining the weight in layman's terms.

Amusingly, Rio was planning to use the pasta and barley as food during his travels but the girl had already discarded such an outrageous notion.
The reason was that the two were not meant as food for travelling.
A large amount of was required to boil barley and dry pasta and water was scarce during travels.
While it was possible to produce water using magic, a magician's magical power was limited, therefore a sufficient amount of water could not be readily produced.
Furthermore, the barley being sold was only used to manufacture beer.

「Yes. For 180 servings of pasta, it will amount to 4 silver coins and 50 copper coins. The barley is 50 copper coins for 5 kilograms, correct? Then altogether it will be 5 silver coins.」

Recognizing that pasta was not an ingredient suitable for travelling, Rio quickly calculated the total price to show that he understood his purchase.

「…Please excuse me. Then 15 kilograms of dried pasta and 5 kilograms of barley will be arranged.」

Witnessing mental arithmetic that exceeded that of even a merchant, the girl slightly widened her eyes as she responded.

「Uhm, because the preparations will take a bit, would you like some tea while we process your payment at that table?」

The girl proposed so as she motioned towards a table and sofa set reserved for payment processing and business deals.

「Ah, thank you. I will take you up on that offer.」

Rio decided to accept the invitation because waiting around for his goods to be arranged would be rather uneventful.
Calling another nearby employee to prepare tea for them, the girl invited him to take a seat before doing so herself.

「Now then, would there be anything else you need?」

The girl began talking as Rio sunk his body into the comfortable sofa.

「Let's see. I'd like some cooking utensils and seasonings suitable for travel if you have any. Also, preserved food enough for a single person to last a month. Lastly, a bag large and durable enough to carry it all.」

Although he was anxious about the distance to Yagumo, Rio concluded that he should be fine with the amount of pasta he bought.

「I see. Then I will prepare those items as well. May I ask what your budget may be? The quality of the goods may vary so…」

The girl's curiosity was piqued when she heard Rio request for cooking supplies but did not let it show on her face.

「Let's see. About 10 silver coins for preserved food and I haven't decided an upper limit for seasonings yet.」

In the Yufilia continent, seasoning was not cultivated at the border of the Bertram and Galark Kingdoms so they tended to be quite costly.
Spices in particular were very expensive.

「High quality preserved food can be bought with that much. As for seasonings, what would you prefer?」

A woman wearing a maid uniform suddenly appeared in front of Rio.
He was slightly surprised to see a maid employed in a high class firm. After the the tea was gracefully set on the table by the maid, Rio turned towards her and listed off the ingredients he sought.

「Well, I'd like salt, garlic, herbs, olive oil, pepper if possible, cloves, nutmeg, and red peppers.」

In truth, Rio craved for soy sauce and miso but he had not seen any evidence that either of the two existed.
Seeing that soybeans existed, it may be possible to create them using barley instead of rice.

（Liselotte-san introduced pasta and manju so it's possible that she's also making soy sauce and miso but I haven't heard anything about it. Oh well, it's not something a single person can make by herself if she doesn't know the recipe. Maybe I'll try making some myself after settling down.）

Rio knew the recipe because he lived in a rural area in his previous life.

「Ahaha, that's quite an extravagant order. But, of course we'll have it all prepared for you. Salt garlic, herbs, and olive oil aren't that expensive but as for the rest, it will be one silver for 100 grams.」
「Then please. As long as it's under one gold in total, that will be sufficient. Now then, let us enjoy our tea.」

After settling his order with great effort, Rio was finally able to enjoy the tea that was about to cool down.
He brought the saucer up to his chest and enjoyed the tea's fragrance while admiring the light blue saucer's intricate design.
Finally, he brought the cup along with the saucer to his lips before taking a sip. He savoured the taste in his mouth before swallowing.
The girl displayed an astonished expression at his series of refined movements.

「Do you happen to be familiar with tea etiquette? Your movements are awfully refined.」
「Ah, an acquaintance of mine is quite particular when it comes to tea. I became accustomed to it after accompanying her for many years. This distinctive aroma and flavour along with a slight bitterness, this tea leaf must be of Riz production, right? And an excellent grade at that.」

As a result of accompanying Seria in tea drinking over the years, the

tea manners became ingrained into his body to the point where it became natural to him.

「Such incredible insight. Wonderful. Even a good number of nobles are ignorant about tea.」

An expression of disgust could be seen on the girl's face for a moment before being replaced by a bright smile due to meeting somebody who shared a similar interest.
She then also drank her tea in a similarly refined manner.
Gazing at her gesture, Rio caught a glimpse of a Shisa on the cup.

「This table, sofa, and tableware… aren't they a little too luxurious just for payments on an open floor?」

Rio opened up a topic for some small talk.
He surmised that the tableware's value was at least several silver coins and was almost certain the table and sofa were worth several gold coins.

「Fufu, that's because this is used for valuable business negotiations. It is only proper to provide our dear guests with the hospitality they deserve.」

The girl proudly explained the rationale behind it.

「As expected of the firm said to be run by the Galark Kingdom's talented Liselotte-sama. Pasta is also one of Liselotte-sama's prided creations.」
「Eh, ah, yeah. She will most certainly be pleased to hear that.」

The girl seemed to tremble slightly upon hearing Liselotte's name.

（It can't be…）

At that moment, a crazy idea surfaced in his mind, but Rio quickly drove the notion away.

「By the way, I'm sorry if this is prying too deep, but is dear customer an adventurer by any chance?」

The girl asked a personal question.
The conversation had drifted towards casual topics rather than

business talks so such a question was not considered to be disrespectful.
Rio opened his mouth to answer the girl.

「Oh, no, I'm not registered as an adventurer. I'm actually in the middle of a journey and don't plan to register anytime soon since I'm not worried about my expenses yet.」

（I doubt I can safely register at the guild in the first place since I'm a wanted person.）

Rio mulled over his problems while staring at the cup held over the girl's breasts before returning his gaze to the girl's face.

「I see. Dear customer's hair colour isn't something commonly seen either. Were you born in a foreign country?」

Possessing civilized manners and educated speech, an intelligence that could perform complex mental arithmetic, and proper tea etiquette, all of that was only at odds with his attire.
Furthermore, he did not try to haggle during his purchase.
The girl speculated Rio was the son of a foreign noble travelling abroad incognito.
It was a misunderstanding Rio was thankful for.

「Indeed, dark hair is uncommon in this country, but is actually quite common in the east…」

Rio casually hinted at coming from a country in the east.
If it became known that he came from the Bertram Kingdom, his movements would become restricted when the wanted list arrived in the Galark Kingdom.

「Ah, come to think of it, I actually have an acquaintance residing in the capital of the Bertram Kingdom. Do you know how I can send a letter there?」

Having said that, Rio finished his tea that had become lukewarm.
He wondered whether a firm of this size would handle mailing duties as well.

「As a matter of fact, our firm also handles mail to and from the

Bertram Kingdom capital. It's because we have business partners there as well. Would you like to write your letter while we prepare your goods and settle the payment?」
「By all means, please. Shall we finalize the payment?」

Ceasing their casual conversation, they returned to business related matters.
The total amount came to a single gold coin. A parchment to write the letter, as well as a quill and bottle of ink was brought to him.

「Then, I will finish preparing the goods. Please call me when you're done writing your letter.」
「Thank you very much.」

He finished writing his letter about 20 minutes later.
He called out to the nearby employees and oddly enough, the same girl from before came again.

「Please deliver this to the Bertram Kingdom Royal Institute.」
「Most certainly. To confirm, the recipient is Seria Claire-sama right?」

Rio passed the letter to the girl and she gingerly accepted it.
Her eyes widened in surprise when she saw who the letter was addressed to and she once again confirmed that the recipient was indeed as written.

「Yes. I leave it to you.」

Rio believed the letter would arrive safely because he trusted that a firm as reputable as the Rikka Firm would not let their customers down.

「Certainly. Then, here are the goods you requested. Please confirm it.」

An employee who had been standing on the side stepped forward and handed over a bag to Rio.
Although it was considerably heavy even for a grown man, it did not prove to be a problem if Rio strengthened his strength and body.
Everybody in the area stared in surprise at Rio, who had the physique of a boy, effortlessly lifting the bag.

「Thank you very much. Farewell.」

Rio bid farewell with a wry smile and left the Rikka Firm office.
The girl took a step forward to make sure he was gone.

「He's an acquaintance of Seria Claire? Seriously, who is he?」

The girl muttered under her breath in curiousity.
Earl Claire's household was well known even among those in the Galark Kingdom.
However, the person who held even greater fame was the Earl's daughter, Seria, who was hailed as a genius and sought by research institutes everywhere.
And now, in the girl's hands was a letter addressed to that Seria Claire.
The girl was genuinely astonished that the boy she met just now was an acquaintance of such a distinguished person.
She desperately wanted to dig deeper into the matter but could not because it would be impolite and a breach of trust to do so.

（So he's a foreign noble after all? Well, I can always ask that child directly when she's finished delivering the letter.）

The girl remembered that one of her subordinates was friends with Seria Claire and decided to have her deliver the letter.
She was to go to the Bertram Kingdom on an important business trip the day after tomorrow anyway.
The girl decided to take the aforementioned subordinate along as her escort.

（This is the first time I've talked to a person with black hair in this world. I must say, it was quite a fascinating encounter.）

Liselotte and Rio, two people who were reincarnated, ended their first meeting without realising the other was also a fellow reincarnator.

Chapter 16
Inn

Having left the Rikka Firm's head office, the sun had already begun to set as Rio made his way towards the inn district.
The inn district was not all that far from the marketplace.
The surrounding shops were already buzzing with activity as people gathered around bars and restaurants for the evening.
Rio examined the surrounding buildings trying to find an inn to his liking.

（I want to, at least, stay in an inn with a bath.）

Although bathing culture existed in the Bertram and Galark Kingdoms, baths where one could submerge their whole body only existed in hot spring regions.
Producing hot water was also expensive.
Therefore, bathing merely consisted of a wooden bucket approximately 1 meter in diameter filled with water warmed using the residual heat of a kettle. To wash, one would scoop up water from the bucket and pour it over their body.
In the case of a rich household, a magic tool was used to heat the water allowing a sauna to be installed in the house.

Cheap inns without even a bathtub could easily be found everywhere though inns with saunas did exist.
Rio was aiming for an inn with a bathtub since he was not currently interested in a sauna.

「Nee~ Nee~ That black-haired Onii-san over there!」

While Rio was restlessly looking around for an inn suiting his needs, a voice suddenly called out to him.
People possessing black hair were extremely rare in this country.
Thinking it could only be himself who was being called, Rio turned

around to see a typical city girl wearing an apron over a tunic dress. She was probably two or three years younger than him.

「E~tto, are you referring to me?」
「Yup, that's right! Are you by any chance looking for an inn?」

So as not to let a potential customer escape, the girl clung to Rio's arm.

「Ah yeah. Is there a bathtub? I've been wanting to take a bath.」
「Yup, there is!」

The girl gave him a cheerful answer.

「Oh that's great. Then I'd like to stay for a night.」
「Yay! One guest, get! Over here! Quick, quick!」

The girl impatiently began pulling Rio towards a nearby inn.
It was a wooden two-story building. Just at a glance, one could tell the building had some age behind it.

Upon entering, a counter greeted them with a door on the right leading to the dining hall and bar.
Noisy voices could be heard from the other side of the door.
Merry singing and loud quarrels, such noises indicated that the men inside were already drunk.

「One silver coin for a night including dinner and breakfast. Hot water and a towel will be another 10 copper coins. The fee is to be paid in advance!」

Rio smiled wryly at the rowdy clamour while the girl cheerfully explained the rates.
The girl was a splendid inn employee.

「Then, one night with hot water and a towel please.」

Having already intended to bathe, Rio replied immediately and handed over 1 silver and 10 copper coins.

「Roger! Thank you for your patronage~! By the way, what's your name?」

The girl asked him in high spirits.
Such an energetic child, Rio thought.
It was a refreshing sight in contrast to all the irritated looks from the Royal Institute.

「It's Rio.」
「So it's Rio. I'm Chloe, best regards from now on!」

Chloe smiled sweetly.

「Yeah, best regards to you too.」

In contrast to the bright and cheerful Chloe, Rio's expression was rather dull.

「Muu~ you keep making a sullen face, you should smile more! Smile! Smile!」
「Haha…」

Rio gave a wry smile.

「Muu~ well, that's good enough. I'll take you to your room!」

Saying that, Chloe grabbed and pulled Rio's hand.

「Here's your room. The toilet's over there. You can use the well outside as you like. Just call when you need hot water and a towel! And lastly, here's the key. I recommend that you don't leave any valuables in the room though. Do you have any questions?」

Somehow, Chloe said all that in a single breath.

「It's alright, I don't have any.」

Her heartwarming attitude made Rio genuinely laugh.

「O— that's not something to laugh about! Muu~ Onii-san's more attractive when smiling! Anyway, if you need anything, feel free to ask anytime! Come downstairs when you've finished putting away your luggage because it's already time for dinner. The dining hall is to the right of the reception. Ah, and please don't get into any fights with other Adventurers.」
「Ah— are you expecting something like that?」

Not having any intentions of involving himself with anything troublesome, Rio intended to obey to her request.

「Un, you could say it's almost an everyday occurrence at an inn. A lot of people come to pick a fight, especially against the younger ones. The adults are really just idiots! To so easily be provoked…」

Rio saw a shadow cast over her face as she complained.

「Well, I'll just ignore them so don't worry.」
「U~n, do your best okay? Somehow, Rio doesn't sound too convincing…」

Leaving with a concerned expression, Chloe skipped her way back to the first floor.
Rio unlocked the door to his room and entered to unload his luggage before making his way to the bar.
When he opened the door to the bar, he was met with the scent of alcohol and loud noises.
A large majority of the room turned their gazes towards Rio.
Hesitating on where to sit, Chloe guided him to a counter seat.

「I'll get you your food right away. Would you like a drink? Only the first cup is free, though.」
「What do you have?」

Since he came here, he might as well drink some alcohol—

「Beer, wine, and mead, alcohol is only free for the first cup, though. Tea and milk are free afterwards.」

Chloe listed the free drinks.

「I'll have a beer then.」

Although Rio was interested in the paid drinks, he decided to choose a free drink for the time being.

「Ue~, you can drink such a bitter thing?」

It seemed like Chloe had yet to understand the merits of beer.
By the way, even children were allowed to drink in this world.

「That's how it is. Oh, and I'm hungry so I'd like to order immediately.」
「Roger! You can look forward to mother's signature dish today.」

Chloe skipped back into the kitchen.
And then, as if on cue, three burly adventurer-like men waddled over.
Although Rio noticed them approaching, he did not even glance at them.

「Gahahahahaha! Ooi, Nii-chan. Can ye even drink that beer ye ordered? This no place fer young'uns who can't drink~」
「That's right, that's right. It's bad for yer body! Why doncha go running home and drink mommy's milk~?」
「Now, now guys. Yer all scaring him so much he can't even speak.」

It appeared that the men were already drunk.
The guests sitting at other tables were watching Rio while smirking.
Rio frowned at the men's foul breaths reeking of alcohol.

「Hey! It's no good to bully Rio. Rio, here, a second helping of bread and soup are free of charge. I personally baked the bread!」

Chloe brought over the food with a worried face.
A considerable amount of food was piled up on the wooden plate.

「Is that so? Thank you. Then, I'll have another piece of bread later.」
「What, hey ya bastard Rio. How dare you let a lil' girl defend ya and still call yerself a man.」

Ignoring the Adventurers' provocations, Rio took out his own set of tableware and began to eat.
The food was quite delicious. His knife, fork, and spoon were moving non-stop.

「Che, you even prepared yer own tableware. Such a fancy noble-sama.」

Surrounded by guests eating with their hands, Rio's elegant appearance of eating using proper tableware reflected in the men's eyes.
The men became even more disgusted.

「Oi, ya listenin' ta me!?」

Although Rio was enjoying his bread, the Adventurers were starting to lose their temper at his carefree manner.
Chloe nervously watched the situation unfold from the kitchen.

「Oi!」
「Don't ignore me!! Look at me!!!」

One of the men shouted at Rio and grabbed his collar forcing him to stand.
Rio's current height had not yet reached 160 centimeters while the opposing men easily exceeded 2 meters in height.

「Uwa, your breath stinks. What do you want?」

Rio spoke in an irritated tone.

「Whatcha just say!?」
「Look here buddy. Even though I put in so much effort to talk to you, you just ignore me? Ya got anything to say to me!?」

The surroundings became dead silent in an instant as everybody watched the commotion.

「Look, I don't even know you in the first place so I thought you were talking to someone else. Also, your breath stinks, can you stop talking… actually no, can you stop breathing?」

When Rio expressed his discomfort, the men's shoulders began to tremble.
The whole bar burst out in laughter at his remarks.

「Ahaha. Oi, oi. That boy is making light of them~」
「That's right, that's right. Jeane! Isn't that great for you~」

The surrounding guests jeered at the men picking a fight against Rio.
As expected, the man called Jeane's face was dyed red.

「Yo— YOU BASTARD!」

When Jeane started to raise his fist, Rio swiftly struck his opponent's jaw with an open palm.

「GAH!」

The strike gave Jeane a cerebral concussion causing him to fall on his knees and onto the ground.
It would likely take several minutes before he could regain consciousness. All the guests in the vicinity were unable to comprehend what just happened and could only blankly stare in surprise at the fallen Jeane.
Rio sat down again and resumed his meal.

「Oi! What'd ya do to Jeane ya bastard!?」

One of Jeane's companions shouted at Rio.

「Who knows? Maybe he drank too much and got alcohol poisoning.」

Having gotten his revenge for disturbing his delicious meal, Rio feigned ignorance at the lackey's question and quickly wolfed down the remainder of his meal.

「Ah, Chloe, seconds please.」
「Ye— Yes!」

Despite being stunned by the current events, Chloe regained her senses when called.
Replying in a fluster, she quickly darted back into the kitchen.

「Oi! 」

Jean's companion loudly spoke up once again.

「Thank you very much. The bread's delicious. You should return to the kitchen, things might get a little messy.」

Thanking Chloe who brought out the second helping of bread and soup, Rio stood up with a sigh.

「O— Okay. Your welcome.」

Heeding his warning, the frightened Chloe returned to the kitchen.

「Are ya listening to me!?」

The man angrily glared at Rio as he reached for his knife on his

waist.
Rio dumbfoundedly looked at the man.

「I wouldn't do that if I were you. I won't go easy on you if you plan on using that.」

Rio sternly warned him in a cold voice.

「Let's see you try!!!」

Unfortunately, the man was already dead drunk so Rio's words could not get through.
The man furiously unsheathed his knife.
Despite also being drunk, the remaining companion's expression paled at Rio's words. However, he could not turn back from a situation that he and his companions started which was further reinforced by the other man's drawn knife.
Rio kicked his opponent's forward leg and like that, the man fell to the ground spectacularly.
Taking the man's knife, Rio stabbed it into the thigh of the other man who had remained standing.

「GUAAAAAA!!!」

The man who got stabbed released a loud cry and crouched down.
The fallen man glanced at his companion in horror and looked back at Rio with a pale face.

「A— Ashil! O— Oi! What the hell are you doing!?」

Seeing the knife protruding from Ashil's thigh, the man scowled angrily at Rio.

「What? It was legitimate self-defense. He was acting violently so I stabbed him.」

Rio spoke in a calm manner.
He had learned to always keep calm when dealing with such people after getting involved with those back in the Royal Capital.
He also found those who derived pleasure from harming others to be absolutely despicable.
These men were at fault for one-sidedly deciding to attack to him.

Rio hardened his heart and brushed away the man's complaints.

「The hell didja say!? Look at what you just did!」

However, the man refused to accept Rio's answer and flared up at him.

「Isn't that your knife? You should understand the repercussions of drawing a knife in such a crowded area. Since you drew your knife and slashed at me, I exercised my right to defend myself.」

Rio spoke while staring coldly at the man.

「Should I just wait there quietly and get stabbed?」

With that, Rio signalled the end of the discussion.

「We— Well no… but…」

Maybe he had sobered up a bit but the man's expression was as white as a ghost.

「It's only a small wound but I suggest you stop the bleeding quickly. He won't die but you shouldn't leave it like that.」

Rio took his eyes off the man and sat down on the counter to resume his meal again.
As expected, the surrounding guests who were sneering at Rio earlier were now dead silent.

「A— Ashil-san! Are you alright!?」

A woman came rushing over with a pale expression.
She was a beautiful woman in her late twenties but carried a tired atmosphere.

「GAAA!」

Unable to respond to her, Ashil continued wailing loudly and writhing on the floor while grasping his thigh.

「I— I'm going to pull out the knife and stop the bleeding now. It's going to hurt but please endure it.」

Saying that, the woman pulled the knife out of his thigh and began administering treatment.

「IT HUUURTS!」

Even though the woman immediately dressed the wound in bandages, blood spewed out from the wound instantly dyeing the bandages red.
Seeing that the woman had fallen into panic, Rio let out a deep sigh and approached the man.

「Please, step aside.」
「Eh?」

Rio ignored the woman's perplexed voice.
Carrying the bulky Ashil to a corner of the room, Rio undid the bandages.
The surroundings guests watched in astonishment as he effortlessly lifted the man.

「『Heal[11]』」

Light shown from Rio's outstretched hand over the man's wound as he chanted an incantation under his breath.
It was not magic that he used, but Spirit Arts.
A geometrical pattern would appear when one invoked magic but that was not the case for Spirit Arts.
Rio hid the treatment using his body so that the onlookers would not notice the anomaly.
Closing the gaping wound, Rio only gave the man the bare minimum treatment so as to not arouse suspicion.

「I've stopped the bleeding. However, please refrain from any intense movements for the next few days.」

Rio talked loud enough for everyone to hear him but they were all too stunned to give a reaction.

「Se— Seriously…?」
「Ju— Just now, that was『Heal』right…? This is the first time I've seen it…」
「That kid's a mage…」

「Could he be a noble?」
「I— Isn't this really bad…? Laying hands on a noble can get you executed.」

Finally understanding what Rio had done, the surrounding guests started to anxiously talk amongst themselves.
While there were few commoners who were able to use magic, people who could use『Heal』were exceptionally rare due to the high difficulty of its magic control.
On top of that, witnessing a boy who had yet to even reached adulthood use it so casually left them all flabbergasted.
Rio became annoyed at the noisy atmosphere.

「Chloe.」
「Ye— Yes!」

Rio called out to Chloe to inquire about the bath so he could retire for the night, but she responded in a clearly frightened voice.
Her eyes no longer carried the friendly feeling from before.

「Sorry. It's nothing. The food was delicious. Thank you.」

Thanking her, Rio left the dining hall and returned to his room.

Notes

1. Read as "Heal", written as "Healing Magic"

Chapter 17
Departure

The next morning, Rio decided to depart from the inn just before sunrise.

「Thank you so much for treating the injured guest yesterday. It was thanks to you that the situation didn't spiral out of control.」

The women who treated the injured man yesterday also happened to be the landlady of the inn. She deeply bowed her head in apology to Rio.

「No, please don't worry about it. Things like that are bound to happen to someone like me travelling at this age. There's no need for you to apologize.」

Rio waved his hand in reply, dismissing the landlady's apology.

「Still, I should've been the one to intervene first but I thought it was just the usual quarrel so I was late in noticing the severity. I am truly sorry.」

It seemed like drunken brawls were a daily occurrence for bars. However, judging from her words, things usually did not escalate to the point of bloodshed.

「No, I was also partly at fault for provoking them. Well, alcohol certainly played a part, but I think they reaped what they sowed for getting that drunk.」

Rio displayed a ridiculing expression as he recalled the drunk men. Despite acting violently, they were drunk so it could not be said that they were inherently bad people.

「About that, I don't believe they truly bore any ill will towards you.

They're usually good people. It's probably because they really care for Chloe and saw her acting intimately with another boy of her age that, with the addition of alcohol, made them inadvertently want to tease you?」

The landlady tried to defend the men's actions.
She was surely a kindhearted person.
However, Rio found it unpleasant to agree with her reasoning.

「Is that so…?」

Rio did not hold a grudge against those men so while he was not angry, he still held an indescribable feeling. Therefore, he gave a vague answer.

「I am deeply sorry. You also couldn't take a bath due to yesterday's commotion despite having already paid for it right? I'll return your whole payment as an apology.」

Having said that, the landlady returned the total sum he paid for lodging and bathing in a small sack.

「No, it's alright. I caused you trouble and the food was delicious too. Thank you for the meal.」

Rio refused the landlady's offer.

「But, you still haven't eaten breakfast yet. Uhm, can you please wait a bit? I'll be back right away. I'll make you a bento[11] instead.」

Leaving those words, the landlady left the sack of money on the counter and hurried to the kitchen before Rio even had a chance to reply.

（She's an honest and good-natured person but, quite naive. She's trusting enough to leave the sack of money in front of me.）

Such was the impression Rio had of the landlady.
How to put it? The landlady's personality strangely suited her.
Rio took a peek at the kitchen and saw Chloe and an unknown girl putting on their aprons.
When the two spotted Rio, they quickly retreated further into the

kitchen.

（Was that… Chloe’s younger sister? She’s still quite young.）

From her looks, she was probably around the age of a lower grade elementary schooler.
Chloe was probably an upper-grade elementary schooler at most.
When Rio wondered if it was appropriate for such a young girl to work at an inn, he realised the hardship of inn’s landlady.

（Could it be that only the three of them work here? Come to think of it, I haven’t seen any signs of a husband.）

Upon arriving at the inn, Rio had never seen a hint of a husband figure.
He previously thought the husband shut himself up in the kitchen but it seemed like the landlady managed the kitchen as well.

（Well, whatever.）

Since the landlady did not seem to mind, Rio abandoned the train of thought when the landlady returned with a bento in her hands.

「I’m sorry since it’s mostly just yesterday’s leftovers, but I stuffed a lot of it into the bread. Chloe woke up early to bake it so please take it.」
「Thank you. I’m extremely grateful for this.」

Rio expressed his gratitude with a smile.

「Oi! I’m back!」

Suddenly, an evidently drunk man appeared from the inn’s entrance.
When he noticed the landlady, he began walking towards her with unsteady steps.

「Honey! Again, you’re already that drunk and it’s only morning!」
「Shut upp! I only drank a teensyy bit!」

The man suddenly slapped the landlady while yelling.
Rio could only look at the scene in astonishment.
It appeared that the drunkard was the landlady’s husband.
Staying out all night, coming home drunk in the morning, and hitting

his wife when criticized, Rio could not see him as a decent husband.
Rio could not bear to just stand by and watch the landlady be abused by her husband, but it was also not a place where he could casually stick his nose into.

「Uugh.」

However, when he saw the landlady crouched down and holding her hands over her swollen cheek, Rio approached her with a sigh and treated her wound using Spirit Arts.
The swelling disappeared in an instant and despite being surprised, the landlady understood what he did and thanked him with a bow.

「What? What'd you do!?」

Although the landlady's husband did not understand what just happened, he glared at Rio with an irritated expression when he saw Rio assisting his wife.

「Stop it! He's a guest!」

The landlady stood before her husband to block him from approaching Rio in a hurry.

（She's going to get hit again…）

Rio was astonished at the landlady's action.
He understood that she held a strong sense of responsibility but she was far too reckless.
When the landlady's husband was about to hit her again, Rio parried his strike and gently pushed him onto the floor.

「『Detoxify[21]』」

A faint light emitted from Rio's hand and reason returned to the husband's eyes after a few seconds.

「I used magic to sober you up. Are you fine now?」

Rio spoke to him in a cold voice.

「A— Ah… Sorry about that.」

The landlady's husband apologized in a slightly bewildered voice having had his mind cleared.

「If you're going to apologize to me, apologize to Landlady-san too.」

Rio directed a glance at the landlady as he spoke to her husband with a tinge of disdain.

「So— Sorry.」

An awkward apology was given.
Although he hit his wife in a drunken rage, he did not seem like a man who normally behaved violently.

「Th— Thank you so much!」

The landlady deeply lowered her head in appreciation to Rio.

「No, it was nothing. I only did it because it'd become a nuisance to the other guests if things continued. Thank you for the bento. Farewell.」

Bidding the landlady farewell, Rio left the inn before he was roped into any further trouble.

（Well, it's not like anything's going to change.）

Rio once again regretted poking his nose into somebody else's problem [131]. Problems were best left to be settled by related parties.
He sunk into a somewhat depressed state for the rest of the morning.

「I guess I should have a manju.」

In order to forget about his worries, Rio decided to try some local cuisine that he missed out on yesterday.
The bento he received from the landlady, he was going to save for lunch.
Despite it still being quite early in the morning, the market was already open.
Morning for the people of this world began early.
Even people who were not merchants or farmers still woke up at six

in the morning at latest.
The market was already bustling with numerous stalls selling breakfast. The mouth-watering fragrance of cooked food permeated the air.

「Two orders of manju, please.」
「Got it!」

Rio handed over 10 copper coins in exchange for the two manju.
Although steam could be seen rising from the manju, its appearance was closer to that of a fried manju.
The springy texture of the dough left a bit to be desired.

Regardless, the manju exceeded his expectations as he savoured the taste inside his mouth.
The hearty flavour of the meat juices seasoned with salt spread throughout his mouth.
It was delicious.
However, the flavour was closer to that of a hamburger rather than a steamed manju.
Those were Rio's impressions of the manju.

(I don't know what was put in this… No actually, the seasoning is made using ginger and oyster sauce, and I think there's a hint of sesame oil too.)

Rio pondered over why he still found the overall flavour to be slightly lacking.
It did not mean that it was not good.
He was just a little disappointed since the taste deviated from what he was expecting.
Rio knew how to make manju.
Rather, the idea of collecting ingredients during his travels to make seasonings suddenly came to his mind.

Cooking was one of Rio's few hobbies since he lived alone in his past life and he constantly brainstormed for new ideas and recipes.
Thanks to that, although he was not well-versed in specific cuisines, he could prepare an ordinary meal as long as he had ingredients.
Apart from humans, other humanlike beings also existed as well as many creatures not found on earth. However, much of the flora and

fauna were similar.
Perhaps ingredients that could not be found in this area were abundant in others.

（Should I look for some when I have some spare time?）

Rio considered harvesting or purchasing any familiar ingredients he might come across during his travels.
While thinking about such things, he arrived at the city's eastern gate.
There was a highway that cut through the forest, but Rio deliberately veered off the highway and entered the forest.

A search warrant for Rio in the Galark Kingdom had not been issued yet but it was only thanks to his speed that he was able to outrun any possible pursuers.
If he was to move quickly, he wanted to do so in a place where people would not notice.

The forest was shrouded in mist since it was still early in the morning.
Rio began to run at a slightly slower pace than usual due to the decreased field of view.
He skillfully dodged a group of trees blocking his way despite his limited visibility in the fog.
Suddenly, Rio caught sight of what appeared to be the figure of a fallen person.
It lay approximately 30 meters ahead of him.
The person appeared to be lying face down on the ground.

（…Is that a corpse?）

While monsters and other carnivorous creatures rarely approached human settlements, they were quite common if one entered the forest.
Perhaps this was an unlucky soul who encountered such a creature.
As Rio approached the fallen person, he noticed the body was covered in a Haori-like robe.
Judging from its size, the body probably belonged to a child younger than himself.

（…A child. Did they collapse after straying from the highway? But why?）

Despite the rising feelings of doubt, leaving a person, who was possibly in dire need of help, as they were would leave a bad taste in his mouth.
Reluctantly, Rio decided to call out to them.

「Oi, are you okay?」

He lightly shook the body but saw no reaction.
When he rolled the person over to look at their face, warmth from their body could be felt through the robe.

（This person seems to be alive.）

Rio let out a breath of relief and from under the robe's hood, he saw the face of a young girl.

「!!!!?」

Suddenly, the girl's eyes snapped open.
At the same time, bloodlust was felt.
When he glanced at the girl's hand, he saw it firmly gripping a long bladed knife.

Notes

1. Boxed lunch

2. Written as Detoxification Magic, read as Detoxify

3. He promised himself not to interfere with other people's problems in the previous arc but this is the third time he broke it

Chapter 18
Assassin

Having caught a glimpse of the girl's knife, Rio twisted his body at once.
However, the girl's arm suddenly coiled like a snake. Aiming at the small gap between Rio's armour, her knife pierced the side of his abdomen.

「!!!」

*_Gusari_* Feeling the blade enter his body, Rio instinctively grimaced.
When he pushed the girl away from him, the knife lodged in his side came free and blood splurted onto her green clothes.
Confirming that he had separated from the girl, Rio took a step back to take some distance from her.
The girl's stance faltered after being pushed away and the hood concealing her face came off.
Rio was taken aback to see fox ears growing from the girl's head.

（Beastman!）

While surprised to see a beastman for the first time, aside from the pain, a lethargic feeling could be felt from his wound.

（Is this… poison?）

Rio immediately realised that the girl's knife was coated in poison.
It seemed to be a quick acting poison.
Rio quickly put a hand over his wound and began to treat it using Spirit Arts before the poison could spread any further.
The girl who was waiting for the poison to take effect on Rio became surprised when his complexion grew better and immediately dashed towards him.

（So fast!）

The girl's speed astonished Rio.
She was faster than anybody he had encountered before.
She even put knights using『Body Strengthening Magic[11]』to shame.

The place where Rio was stabbed still ached but he did not have the luxury to wait for it to completely heal.
He released his magical power to brush off the girl's killing intent while reinforcing his physical strength and body. Quickly dodging to his right, he managed to evade the girl's incoming strike.
The girl also changed the direction of her charge in response to his evasion.
Rio aimed at the girl's leg and threw a knife.
The girl jumped up to avoid the knife and caught onto an overhanging tree branch. She performed a somersault and nimbly landed on top of the tree branch she was holding onto.

This time, it was Rio's turn to take the initiative and he leapt towards the girl.
Like a sudden gust of wind, he dashed towards her at full speed.
The girl reached into her robe and threw three knives at Rio in a panic
Rio drew his sword from his sheath and deflected all the incoming knives before sheathing it again.

The girl hastily dropped down from the tree to avoid directly confronting Rio on the tree branch with bad footing.
Rio used the tree branch the girl was standing on just a moment ago to kill his momentum.
The landing force broke the branch and Rio continued to fall downwards.
The moment Rio touched the ground, the girl approached and thrust her knife at him.
Even a slight graze from the knife would be lethal.
Parrying the girl's thrust, Rio countered with an open palm strike to the bottom of her chin.
However, it was avoided by a shift of her head.

（Impressive. Her physical abilities surpass most humans despite still

being a child.）

Rio admired the girl’s strength despite being locked in a life or death struggle with her.
He did not think he would lose but the girl’s physical prowess rivaled Rio physical strengthening.

（Still, her movements are sloppy.）

From that fact, Rio was convinced he could not lose.

（No, I shouldn’t be too self-conceited…）

There were no absolutes in battle.
Rio vaguely thought it would be difficult for him to make a serious blunder as long as he incorporated Spirit Arts with the ancient martial arts he studied in his previous life.
In fact, being able to wield Spirit Arts was a huge advantage.
However, that belief made him careless and he was stabbed as a result.
Even if he possessed that power, it was meaningless in the face of a surprise attack.

To make sure he would emerge victorious, Rio carefully studied the girl’s every single move. When she once again thrust her knife at him, Rio was ready.
He dodged all of her attacks launched a counter attack.
The girl slowly began to become overwhelmed.
The difference between their abilities finally became evident.
Rio tried his best to make sure none of his attacks would accidentally kill her.
The battle would have concluded long ago if he used Spirit Arts.

「!!!」

Impatience gradually crept onto the girl’s face.
The girl seemed to understand that she was no match for Rio.
Impatience finally took over and she lunged at Rio, aiming for his heart.

「UGA!」

However, Rio dodged it by slightly rotating his body and drove his open palm into her stomach.
A dull shriek emitted from the girl's mouth. With her balance and concentration broken, Rio shoved the girl's head towards the ground.

「GAH!」

The girl's body strongly hit the ground.
Disarming the knife in her hand, Rio lay her on her back and restrained her.
The girl violently attempted to struggle free of her restraints before realising that she could not move much of her body at all.

「That's enough. Do you understand my words?」

Rio spoke while applying pressure to the girl's body and hands.

「Hii, hii, hi— Uuuu— Higuuuu—」

The girl's body trembled as her face distorted in fear, almost as if she was going mad. Soon afterwards, she burst into tears.

「Uguuuu…」

As if reliving a trauma, the girl emitted a voice that could not even be called a scream. Rather, she was crying.

「Oi. Calm down.」

Rio frantically tried to calm her down.

「Uuu— Le— Let go! St— Stop!」

Rio clicked his tongue. It seemed like the girl had trouble speaking.
He lay the girl on her stomach and struck the back of her neck with his hand. She lost consciousness at once.

「…Just what kind of environment was she raised in?」

Rio looked at the fainted girl with a dubious expression.
Her puppet-like and single-minded attitude to murder made it difficult to believe that her emotions were stable.
She became abnormally frightened the moment she was pinned down.

「This is…」

Rio noticed a collar around the girl's neck.

「A Collar of Obedience… Is she… a slave?」

The Collar of Obedience was a magic tool put on slaves.
Once put on, it was nearly impossible for a slave to go against their master's orders.
When given an order, a desire to carry out said order would arise making it difficult to disobey. As a precaution against disobedience, the slave would experience intense pain if their master recites an incantation.
Although the『Dispel[2]』spell could release the slave collar, it was difficult to learn and was punishable by death if used without the slave owner's permission.
In addition, a person wearing the collar could not use『Dispel』on themselves.
It was that kind of magic tool.

The way the girl started crying was strange.
Rio thought it was perhaps she held a severe trauma against being held down.
However, if untied, she would likely continue to carry out her orders and try to kill him again.
Rio expelled a deep sigh and removed a rope from his backpack to bound the girl's hands and feet.
He drew his knife and pointed it at the girl before lightly shaking her to wake her up.

「Nn… Ah!?」

Bikuri The girl noticed Rio and tried to move.
However, when she noticed that she could not move, she frantically tried to remove her restraints.
Rio brandished his knife before her eyes and matched her gaze.

「Nn—!」

It finally seemed like he could have a proper conversation with her.
Her eyes were still hollow with no light in them but she did not lose

her mind like earlier.

「Are you awake? Answer me if you don't want to die. Nod if the answer is "yes", remain silent if it's "no".」

Telling her that in an indifferent tone, he grabbed her neck and observed her expression.
From the start, Rio did not believe the girl would tell the truth.
His rough approach was precisely because of that.
Realising that she was seen through, the girl stared at Rio in fear.

「You're a slave, right?」
「……」
「Is your master a Bertram Kingdom noble?」
「……」
「You were ordered to kill me, right?」
「……」

The girl kept silent throughout his questioning.
However, Rio already knew that the answers to all the questions so far were "yes".
Finally, Rio heard everything he wanted to hear. The girl was not of any use anymore.
Now was the question of what to do with her.

「…Do you want to be released from slavery?」

After releasing a sigh, Rio posed such a question.

「……」

It was only for an instant, but light returned to the girl's eyes. Rio did not miss that.

「I see.」

The girl kept staring at Rio as if in a trance.
She was trying to determine Rio's true motive.

「If I free you, will you still try to kill me?」
「……」

After a brief silence, the girl slowly shook her head.

Her pulse, line of sight, breath, sweat, all of her reactions were astutely observed by Rio.

「I see… But after I release you, won't you be treated as a runaway slave? …Are you okay with that?」

The girl became perplexed and looked around restlessly. However, when she saw Rio's sincere expression, she finally gave a small nod.
Having received the girl's answer, Rio held up his right hand to her neck.
A pale light emitted from his hand and the collar fell off her neck and onto the ground.

「……」

The fallen collar was reflected in the girl's eyes.
Stunned, she continued staring without moving.
A moment later, the girl began to rotate her head to ascertain the collar around her neck was gone.

「Eh… fue— fue, hic, hic, UEEEEN.」

Having understood that the collar enslaving her for so long had become undone, the girl suddenly burst into tears.
Rio let out a small breath when he saw her state and sheathed his knife.
After ten or so minutes, her crying finally started to die down.

「Are you okay now?」

Rio called out to the girl.
*_Bikuri_* Startled by his voice, the girl resumed staring at him.

「I've wiped off the poison from your knife so you can have it back. You'll want to escape now.」

Rio treated the place where he struck the girl and cut the ropes binding her.
He also handed back her knife.

「Eh…?」

The girl let out a confused voice at Rio's words.

「Like I said, you should escape quickly. It'll be difficult for you to live in human territory so you should seek shelter in demi-human territory.」

Rio gave the girl advice on what she should do.

「You will find the Demi-human territory east of here. I'm also heading east but unfortunately, my clothes are ripped so I'll have to return to the city to buy new ones. This is where we part.」

The girl remained in a daze after hearing Rio's words.

If she was still under the influence of the slave collar, she would without a doubt continue to try and kill Rio.
If that was the case, Rio would have no choice but to take her life.
However, it was another story now that she did not have the collar.
She would no longer try to kill him since there was no longer a need to.
Rio had freed her under that assumption.
He did not intend on looking after her after freeing her.

Rio had heard that the beastman tribe were very welcoming towards their brethren.
That was why he thought it would be best for the girl to join them.

After telling the freed girl such, Rio turned back to the city of Almond.
He could not feel any hostility or killing intent from the girl any longer.
She simply stood there in a daze watching him leave.

Rio resumed his journey immediately after purchasing a new set of clothes.
He veered off the highway and entered the forest like last time.
Making sure nobody was nearby, Rio began to increase his speed.
When he approached a group of trees, he suddenly stopped.

「…Come out.」

Rio turned around to face his pursuer and called out in a tired voice.
There, stood the fox girl from before.
She seemed surprised to have been noticed but showed herself nonetheless.

「Why are you still following me?」

Rio asked why she was still following him.

「Uh— Uhm, east, go, together…」

Rio was taken aback by her request for an instant.
Although she had difficulty talking, Rio was able to understand her request.
However, he did not understand why.
Why did she ask something like that?
Did she, by some chance, mistaken him for a good-natured person?
Rio considered such a thing.

「Listen here, I didn't help you out of pure goodwill. I also don't intend on taking you along.」

Rio spoke to correct the girl's misunderstanding.
He only helped her because he was reluctant to commit murder.
He did not want to bear a sense of guilt.
For such a selfish reason, he freed her.
It was solely for his own satisfaction.

「…want to go-desu.」

The girl spoke in an almost inaudible voice.
Rio let out a small sigh hearing her repeat her request.

「You know, I'm human. We're selfish existences. Am I not like the ones who enslaved you?」

Hearing Rio's words, the girl shook her head.

「Bad feeling… not there-desu. Weird smell, too, not there.」

The girl pointed at Rio when she said that.
Rio was a little doubtful when he heard her say "weird smell", but it seemed like she used it as a basis for judging people's trustworthiness.

「Most importantly, I can't enter beastmen territory.」

Although his voice was firm, Rio was slightly puzzled at the girl's firm

resolve.
It was definitely not one of desperation.
Many of the beastman tribe resented humans because of how they enslaved their brethren.
If Rio brought a beastman girl there, there was a high likelihood he would be regarded as an enemy.

「Then, up to there, together… want to go… desu.」

The girl's voice carried a firm resolve in it.

She had lived her life as a slave up until now.
During that time, she had always longed for freedom.
However, she had constantly lived under somebody else's orders.
Now that she was free, she did not know what to do.
After Rio returned to the city, the girl walked around the forest aimlessly. When Rio left the city again, she caught a whiff of his scent and for one reason or another, decided to follow him.

Scratching his head with his left hand, Rio let out a sigh and spoke in a resignation.

「…Fine, do as you like. But, once we reach beastman territory, we'll go our separate ways. Understood?」

Rather than having her follow him from behind, it would be better to travel together. Making up a half-hearted reason, Rio accepted her proposal to travel together.

「O— kay.」

The girl nodded while still slightly confused.
Rio looked over her appearance once more.
A green robe covered her from head to toe and there seemed to be various tools hidden underneath.

「Do you have food and water? What about a blanket?」

Rio was checking if she had the minimum necessities.

「Food, have, little. Water, river, drink. Blanket, use this-desu.」

The girl spoke while fluttering her robe.

Rio sighed as a result of what he saw.
With only what she had, it was nowhere near enough for the journey.

「I see. I'll take care of food and water for you. It'd be best if I returned to the city one more time…」

Although Rio found it annoying to have to repeatedly go back to the city, he had to see to the girl's needs now that he allowed her to accompany him.

「Wait here for a bit. I'm going back to the city to buy you some necessities. Let's see, I'll be back in an hour. Understood?」

He instructed the girl to stay where she was.
After the girl gave a timid nod, Rio turned back to Almond again.

「Oh yeah, what's your name?」

Suddenly recalling that he had forgotten to ask something, Rio stopped in his tracks and turned around to ask the girl for her name.

「Latifa.」
「I see. I'm Rio. Nice to meet you, Latifa.」

Notes

1. Written as Body Strengthening Magic, read as Hyper Physical Ability
2. Written as Lift Curse Magic, read as Dispel

Chapter 19
Exchange

When Rio returned to the forest with additional rations and camping equipment for Latifa, the two of them set off towards the east.

It seemed that Latifa was only ever taught『Body Strengthening Magic (Hyper Physical Ability)』.
It was a useful magic but not without its problems.
First off, it operated differently than Rio's body strengthening in such a way that the user's body would become strained after prolonged use.
Furthermore, it constantly consumed magical power so it was quite inefficient.
Though, this was a problem shared with body strengthening via Spirit Arts as well.
In that respect, since the Beastman tribe possessed stronger and more flexible bodies, their affinity with『Body Strengthening Magic(Hyper Physical Ability)』was much better than that of the human race.
Rio also noticed that Latifa had an overwhelming amount of magical power, allowing her to continuously strengthen herself for long distances.

Although Latifa could match Rio's maximum speed when his body was strengthened, her stamina significantly fell short of his.
After 30 minutes of continuous running, she would start gasping for breath.
Rio slowed down to a pace which Latifa was comfortable with so she could catch up.
Despite time being of the essence, they still took proper rests.

「Here, have some water.」

Using Spirit Arts, he filled a canteen he bought for her with water and handed it to her.

「Thank you, desu.」

Latifa drank the water, with gulping sounds coming from her small mouth.
Rio also drank some water from his own canteen while seating himself before Latifa.
*_Guu_* A cute rumble was heard from Latifa's stomach.
When Rio turned his gaze towards Latifa, she vigorously shook her head.
Rio could only wryly smile at her behaviour.

「So it's already time for lunch? …Here.」

Using a knife, he divided the bread from the bento he received from the landlady back at the inn and offered half of it to Latifa.
However, Latifa only stared at the bread in his hands in bewilderment.
Her eyes restlessly darted between Rio and the bread in his hands.

「What's the matter?」
「Me, eat, okay?」

She sought his permission with a frightened look.

Latifa had been conditioned to constantly guess her master's mood.
She was trained in such a way that unless a clear order was given, she was prohibited from doing anything.
Even when a meal was presented to her, she could not eat unless told to.
She was disciplined in such a way.
Her master would always become angry whenever she did something without his explicit permission, so out of fear of being punished, Latifa would always seek permission before doing anything.
In a way, it was a means to shield herself from abuse. Such a reaction became ingrained into her mind and it persisted even after she was released from slavery.
She had only just gained her freedom and chose to immediately

follow Rio so this kind of instinctive behaviour was only natural.

「No need to feel reserved. It's fine for you to eat.」

Although Rio did not understand that Latifa's dependency stemmed from the psychological abuse she received over the years, he assumed that she was accustomed to receiving orders and gently urged her to eat.

Latifa timidly brought the bread to her mouth.
After she ascertained the taste, she quickly began wolfing down the rest of the bread.
The meal was not luxurious by any means. However, for her, who had lived her entire life as a slave, it might as well have been a feast.

「Hic, hic hic, hic, hic.」

Latifa bursted into tears while stuffing her cheeks with the bread.

「I won't steal your food so eat slowly, it's bad for your body otherwise.」

Rio soothingly patted Latifa's back as she ate.

「Hic, Onii-sama, hic, taunted me, hic, everyday, with food, hic.」

Recalling all her meals until now, Latifa's crying became more intense.
Just what kind of treatment did she receive during her meals?
Rio grimaced when he tried imagining it.
When Latifa buried her face into Rio's chest, he simply patted her head quietly whilst waiting for her to calm down.

「I've heard that the beastmen are a race who value their brethren. Latifa will surely be welcomed there. There is no need for you to worry anymore.」

Rio was troubled by what he should say to alleviate Latifa's worries and stop her tears.

「I— Is that really true?」

Latifa looked up at Rio with expectant eyes.

「Yeah, I'm sure of it. It's a far better place than any human country.」

Averting his eyes from Latifa, Rio gazed into the distance.

「Well then, the sun hasn't set yet so we should keep moving. I'm not sure how long it'll take us to reach beastmen territory so we'll have to keep moving.」

In order to try and take her mind off her worries, Rio urged Latifa to set off once again.
Staying where they were would not accomplish anything.
Moreover, his body felt restless.
Latifa gave a slight nod while looking at Rio.

For the next several hours, they continued running with occasional breaks.
They ignored the majority of the monsters they encountered.
Their progress would be significantly hampered if they stopped and dealt with every single one of the monsters.

「We'll be resting here for the night. Wait here for a minute.」

When the sun started to set, Rio discovered an overhang suitable for setting up camp and signalled Latifa to stop.
He collected leaves and branches from the nearby trees and skillfully constructed a makeshift tent.
Although a tent made from wild plants would make most modern people feel hesitant to sleep in, it had many advantages in a world teeming with monsters and wild animals.
The tent easily blended in with the surrounding greenery.
Besides, it also masked its inhabitants' odours to an extent.
Furthermore, nights were cold in the forest and changes in the weather were unpredictable and spontaneous.
Even if it rained, it would be difficult for water to leak through the leaves of a tent created from foliage.
Just being able to stave off the wind and rain would greatly reduce their fatigue.

The area inside was surprisingly comfortable since the tent could

breathe through the numerous tiny gaps between the leaves. Unlike nylon tents, a fire could be maintained inside without worrying about the smoke building up.
Latifa watched in awe as Rio set up their accommodation in the blink of an eye.

「Dinner will be ready soon. You can wait inside, I'll call you when it's ready. Since you have sharp sense of smell, if you notice anything strange, tell me immediately.」

Latifa nodded.
Confirming that she understood him, Rio left the camp.
Usually, while camping outdoors, cooking that produced a strong aroma was undesirable, but Rio was accustomed to flavourful meals from his previous life and had no intentions of eating a dull meal.
Therefore, he did both his cooking and dining in an area away from the camp.

After finding a suitable location, Rio began to cook.
He added water produced using Spirit Arts and salt into a pot.
Pasta was to be tonight's menu.

He heated the pot over the fire created by igniting some branches he gathered beforehand.
Simultaneously, he poured water into a slightly smaller pot that could fit inside the other pot to boil pasta.
The seasoning he used was a combination of spices he purchased from Almond.
Edible wild grasses that were gathered during his journey were also added to improve the nutritional balance of the meal.

He washed the wild grasses while waiting for the pot to warm and then, using a knife, cut them into bite-sized portions.
After he finished chopping the wild grasses, he cut the dried meat into thin slices.
In order to avoid having monsters with a keen sense of smell approach him, he regulated the air currents using Spirit Arts to disperse the smell.
The dish he made was quite extravagant, something not even nobles would be able to dine on while in the middle of a journey.

「Nn?」

Sensing that somebody was approaching, he turned around only to find Latifa making her way over, lured by the smell.
Her nose twitched every so often.
When she noticed Rio looking at her with a wry smile, her face reddened in shame.

「Here, it's soup pasta. The seasoning is something I came up with, though.」

He offered a container containing the soup pasta to Latifa.
Although Rio preferred his food to be spicy, he did not add any spiciness this time since Latifa might not be able to handle spiciness well.

「…『Spaghetti』? This, it's『Spaghetti』, right!?」

Recognizing the contents of the container, Latifa could not hide the astonishment in her voice.

「Ye— Yeah… You can eat it.」

Rio replied in slight bewilderment.

Having obtained Rio's permission, Latifa began eating her pasta with sparkling eyes.
She skillfully wielded her fork, using it to coil up the pasta, as if she already knew the proper way to eat pasta.
Rio could not help but stare in awe at Latifa.
Pasta noodles were not an ingredient native to this world.
She also called it『Spaghetti』.
It was doubtful that she was taught how to use a fork as a slave as well.
And yet, she knew how to eat pasta.

(Could it be she's also… a reincarnator?)

It was definitely a possibility.
Now that he thought about it, just the other day, he also discovered the existence of another reincarnator.
But to meet a fellow reincarnator like this…

Rio was baffled on such a chance meeting.

「Hafu, hafu hafu~」

Latifa was frantically eating the hot pasta.

「It's hot so don't eat too quickly or else you'll burn your tongue. Look, you can dip the bread in to soften it. It'll also help cool down the soup.」

Rio taught Latifa how to eat the bread that was as hard as a preserved biscuit.
Following Rio's recommendation, Latifa ate the bread soaked in the soup and her face broke out into a euphoric smile.
Rio had difficulty gauging Latifa's mental age.
Judging from their interaction thus far, no matter how he saw it, it seemed like her mental age was not too far from her physical appearance.
It seemed that she had a limited amount of societal experience from her previous life.

(Perhaps it's an act… No, there's nothing to gain from doing that. Perhaps she was still a child in her previous life…?)

After mulling over the issue, Rio arrived upon a single conclusion.
It was quite likely that his hypothesis was correct.

Rio thought about Latifa's situation while slowly eating his pasta.
If he guessed correctly, Latifa was at most, an upper-grade elementary schooler who one day, suddenly became a slave.
Although he did not when Latifa regained her memories, he was certain her age was still in the single digits.
Simply adding her current age to her previous life's age would not produce an accurate representation of her mental age either.

(If that's the case, can someone like her understand reincarnation?)

Rio could only imagine the cruel fate that had befallen Latifa.
His own situation, while not great, was still much better than her's.
Although starting out as an orphan was quite undesirable, for better or for worse, he received a proper education, allowing him to gain an understanding of this world.

While he was framed as a criminal, at least he did not have his freedom stolen from him like a slave.
In addition, his mind had already matured allowing him to understand the absurdities of this world.

However, Latifa was different.
A young child living a prosperous life in modern Japan was abruptly deprived of all her rights and treated like a pet.
The abuse she received was probably more than anything he could imagine.
She must have undergone inhumane training for her to become a heartless assassin.

Still, perhaps she had already accepted her life as a slave before she regained her memories.
The reason was that she was born into slavery.

However, once she regained her memories of her former life, it was no longer possible for her to accept a life of slavery.
She would want to be free, to return to her former world. It was likely that was how she felt up until now.
Rio speculated that Latifa bore so much mental suffering that it could not even be considered a trauma anymore.
She lacked a free will as a result of being raised as a slave.
From the beginning, the concept of freedom was completely foreign to her.
However, she regained her memories and through that, a sense of free will.
Could it be considered a misfortune or a blessing?

（Is that why she’s so emotionally unstable…? Damn it.）

The more Rio pondered about Latifa’s circumstances, the more disgusted he became.

Latifa was absorbed in eating Rio’s cooking.
Perhaps it reminded her of her former life, but tears began welling up in her eyes.
When Latifa finished drinking the last remaining bit of soup, she began licking the bowl in regret.
Rio scooped a second helping into her now empty container.

Slightly lowering her head in gratitude, Latifa resumed her meal with a delighted expression.
No longer in the mood to eat, Rio finished what remained of his portion and poured the remainder of the pot into Latifa’s container.

In the end, Rio opted not to reveal that he was also a reincarnated person to Latifa.

Chapter 20

Attack

One month has passed since the departure from Almond and his meeting Latifa.

Currently, Rio and Latifa have slipped out from the Galwark kingdom and are moving into the deep unexplored land.

「Onii-chan！ For our lunch！ What will it be! ？」[11]

When the afternoon break came, Latifa asked Rio what was on the menu for lunch with a smiling face.

「I can't create a too elaborate meal at noon. At most it will be a sandwich from preserved food.」

Rio, with a wry smile, replied to Latifa that brimmed with appetite.

Though Latifa was frightened in the beginning, within this one month, she became considerably more cheerful after her encounter with Rio.

She also became completely attached to him along the way; before he noticed, it had already reached the point where she called him "Onii-chan".

「Onii-chan's cooking！ Is always delicious!」

Nowadays she spoke more clearly.

That was because she always spoke with Rio and through that she quickly started to remember the pronunciation of the words.

「Today too, I will sleep together with Onii-chan! Is that okay? 」

Peering at Rio's face who was starting to prepare sandwiches,

Latifa asked to sleep together with Rio.

Latifa often had nightmares while she slept.

It was to the degree that she cried heavily.

She would, as if frightened about something, come in the middle of the night and softly shook Rio. Rio would then gently lulled/rocked her to sleep. That was how she got so attached to Rio

Nowadays, it came to the point that Rio hugged her every night.

Latifa needed to be embraced by Rio, otherwise she would have nightmares.

「……..Ah, its okay.」

Rio was becoming worried about the current conditions.

Originally, he had no intentions of getting this close.

By now, it is not strange if they had already entered the beastman territory.

He should already have separated from Latifa.

But, by the time he noticed, it was already too late. Latifa already completely depended on Rio.

He was horrified when he imagined what would happen if the girl came to know that he was also a reincarnated person, during this time they were together.

Was that because of the slave habit that was ingrained into her, or because of her lonely life, she was easily moved by even a little bit of gentle kindness?

In any case, Rio now worried that Latifa couldn't simply be separated from him.

（Well, maybe an unexpected quick separation would be good……..）

Rio's inner voice said it loudly, as if sneering at his thoughts.

A sudden separation between someone and another person. [Human partings were abrupt.]

No matter how close they were, no matter how much they rejected the parting, there will be a time where it can't be avoided any longer.

And, when that time comes, how they feel for each other will no longer be the same.

No matter how much the other party wished to always be together, the other one, which is him, might not necessarily think so.

More or less, humans were that kind of creatures; that was what Rio thought.

That is why he himself must resist that lonely feeling from the parting.

He couldn't harbored too many excessive feelings towards the other party.

He mustn't have too many expectations toward the other party.

At least she wouldn't loathe being separated from him too much. Rio tried to persuade himself.

「Nevertheless, as expected, that tree is so huuuuge！」

Latifa, who spoke to Rio, brought him, who was already immersed deep in thought, back to reality.

Latifa pointed at the gigantic tree that could be seen far in the distance, between crevices in the trees.

「That's right.　Though, I don't think that is an ordinary tree……..」

They already noticed the tree yesterday.

The huge tree that towered alone, beyond the other trees, caused a feeling of being overwhelmed inside the huge forest.

Though at first it couldn't be seen as anything but something like small pagoda (a hindu or buddhist temple, typically in the form of a many tiered tower) from a distance, as one got closer they would

feel the great presence and sheer size of that tree.

That tree towered over its surroundings, as if piercing through the sky, and released an overwhelming presence.

Somehow, Rio was being attracted towards that tree.

The reason was that Rio was losing his composure.

「Should we get closer to the tree a bit more？」

「Un！　Let's do that!」

Making a slight detour shouldn't be a problem.

So he asked Latifa; she replied immediately, with a smiling face.

「Then, should we eat our lunch along the way? It's already done. Here.」

He passed the sandwich to Latifa during their conversation; Latifa began to delightfully stuff her cheeks with that sandwich.

Looking at her, Rio also began his meal.

Though the bread was preserved food and harder than french bread, if it was eaten with added ingrendients as flavouring, the texture, while it was being chewed, was irresistable.

They became satisfied with that and finished eating the sandwiches. After several minutes, Rio and Latifa began to move toward the gigantic tree again.

「Onii-chan！ There's an unknown smell in our surroundings since sometime ago!　There are several of them!」

A few hours after they started to move again, their advance was just fine, while keeping their usual pace, till Latifa started to say that.

「Unknown smell？　It's not an animal or a monster?」

「It's different.　The smell of this thing feels sharper. But it's a little different from a human that didn't wash their body.」

Though it was not said in a understandable way, Rio judged that it

was some kind of standard for Latifa.

「Isn't there something more specific about them？」

「…….they're mixed, they're closer to humans, but also different from humans.　Even if it only resembles a little……I feel that it is something I missed so much. Like mother, but it's not mother.」

—-

Though he didn't understand what Latifa's words meant, Rio was no match for that nose of her's.

Because that nose could perceive whatever being it was.

He couldn't just ignore it.

「Do you know where those smells came from？」

So Rio asked; Latifa then sniffed the smell from the surroundings.

「Over there！　As for how far we are from them, I don't know…….. Yet, there's not that much of the smell remains. Maybe a great deal of time passed since it came to this place.」

After hearing that, Rio pondered about the next step of their actions. Before long he opened his mouth.

「I see. Let's take our time and move slowly……, For the time being, should we stop for the day in this place?」

「Okay.」

Then, Rio and Latifa found a suitable camping spot. Latifa went out to collect wild plants that she was familiar with.

During that time, Rio started making dinner at another place a bit away from the camp site.

Lately that was the distribution of the jobs between them.

Rio washed the barley several times in water, and then transferred it at once to another container. The ingredients were chopped dried

meat, wild plants, and preserved cheese.

The fire was lit, then olive oil was poured into a pan and then he waited for it to get to a suitable temperature. He quickly stir fried the chopped wild plants and meat.

He put the barley in there, breaking it into pieces, then stir fried it further.

When he felt that the barley looked done, as it turned transparent, he added the seasoning and hot water. [2]

Soon, when the contents of the pot was boiling, the cooking was done after it was covered with a lid for a little more than 10 minutes.

He took it off the fire and let the steam inside do the finishing touch. He completed the risotto by sprinkling it with cheese and pepper.

「Onii-chan！ The smell is nice!」

Coincidentally, at the same time he finished with the cooking, Latifa who had completed the bedding came by, lured by the aroma; this was already an everyday occurence for them.

「You must wash your hands first.」

Rio produced water, with spirit arts, for Latifa to wash her hands, that were dirtied by soil. Latifa started to eat immediately after she said「Itadakimasu」in a small voice. [3]

Though Latifa occasionally used Japanese language in that manner every day, Rio didn't dare point that out to her.

Though it was simply just risotto, it can be considered a feast of the highest class in the category of camping meals.

「This risotto is delicious！」

Risotto too; as far as Rio knew, there was no human race, in this world, that knew about this cooking, but Latifa, that had never properly eaten the cooking of the human race in this world, shouldn't even know about this kind of cooking.

「Thank you very much. Though, the taste was a little worse, despite using same seasoning」

The ideal was naturally to complete the seasoning for each cooking style but, with his current money, he can only afford the minimum seasoning for western oriented cooking.

Even so, Rio was happy that Latifa ate his cooked meals every day and said it was delicious.

「You should be tired right now; we also need to wake up early tomorrow.」

「Un！」

Latifa nodded with a smile on her face.

After finishing their meal, they went back to the camp site. With boiling hot water in a wash pot, the two of them washed their bodies in turn, inside the tent of plants.

Though it was possible for them to make a Japanese style bathroom, they couldn't put too much effort into such a luxury, since they were in the middle of a journey.

It was still better (than nothing) since with this, their bodies wouldn't smell unpleasant.

「Good night, onii-chan」

Inside the tent, that became totally dark when the lamp was turned off, Latifa said that while sticking her body to Rio.

Rio also fell asleep and only left a weak consciousness behind that stretched in their surroundings and connected to one part of his nerves, so that he could instantly responded when something unusual happened.

That was a skill that he acquired when he lived in the slums, so that he could instantly responded to whatever happened during his sleep.

Maybe that was also not too detestable experience, as an orphan, since it was turned out to be useful in this journey.

After that, Rio couldn't sense whatever happened in their surroundings.

It was because when he became aware of it; there was an unknown girl before Rio.

From the features of her face, she seemed around 16 years old.

For some reason Rio was sleeping on her lap. [4]

For some reason, Rio also accepted that situation.

Rio winked his eyes to confirm whether that girl was real.

No matter how many times he winked his eyes, that girl still in there.

Somehow that girl really existed in that place.

Rio was surprised.

That girl was expressionless, or should he say serene and transient. Her face was cold, as if it only had a little trace of life.

But, it was not like that would become her flaw.

Because, it seemed he once saw that extremely beautiful and lovely girl before, that was what Rio felt.

Her beauty radiated an overwhelming divine aura.

No, even the saying that she's beautiful was not enough to describe her.

That was what Rio thought.

Though such a cute girl could only be called a work of god, looking from above, her eyes saw Rio's face.

Accidentally, that girl's long, pink blonde hair tickled Rio's face.

Feeling awkward about that, Rio quietly moved his line of sight from the girl and surveyed his surroundings.

White. There was a pure white room.

It was a huge and vast white room that spread in all directions.

Rio thought that the atmosphere in that room felt extremely dreary.

And then, somehow, when he saw that room, why did he feel as if his heart had been plucked out? It felt too lonely.

How could it be? It was very, very unpleasant.

Rio unintentionally knitted his eyebrows.

He was averting his eyes from the naked person in front of him, then glanced back at her.

『Who are you？』

—-

And then, the girl began the conversation with her mystical voice, that gave a transparent like feeling to him.

———I? I'm Rio, but……

That was strange. Even when he said the words, somehow his voice didn't come out.

『Rio, Rio……., Rio……』

But, the girl knew what Rio said.

Somehow he didn't think that as a problem.

The girl stared absentmindedly at Rio's face and repeatedly murmured his name, as if trying to engrave it into her memories.

————Then, who are you?

Rio spoke his "words" for the second time.

『…….Me?　I, I …….. I don't know』

In some respects the girl's expression looked as if she was troubled by something.

————Don't know?

『Yes……』

————I See……

The atmosphere that exuded from the girl was as if she could disappear at any moment, thus, Rio spoke to her with a worried voice.

『But, I might recall it if I were together with Rio……』

————-Together…….with Me? Why?

In hearing that, Rio inclined his head because he couldn't fully comprehend the meaning of that girls words.

『Since I'm tied with you……. Something like that』[151]

It made him more and more confused.

But, strangely, those words warmed his heart.

Why was it that he felt awfully relieved? [161]

It seemed that was what he felt.

It was fine for this kind of feeling to continue forever.

That was what he thought, Rio's lips formed a slight smile.

『But, I'm still sleepy……..』

The girl's eyes thinned as if her consciousness also became hazy.

Looking at those eyes, somehow also made Rio feel drowsy.

And then, his consciousness faded again. Then, "Click", Rio's eyes opened.

What was reflected in his eyes was the inside of the tent that was covered in plants.

What was the meaning of that? It was as if he had just woken up from a very deep slumber.

He got a feeling, as if he had dreamed about something.

But, he couldn’t exactly remember the dream.

Though he felt unpleasant about falling into a deep sleep, there was nothing unusual at all.

It seemed there wasn’t any indication of dangerous animals in their surroundings.

The night was still dark and quiet. [7]

He didn’t know how many hour had passed. He could guess wrongly, as he had fallen into a deep sleep; that was what Rio thought.

He immediately felt the temperature of someone beside him. Looking at his side, it was Latifa, sound asleep. [8]

Rio decided to leave the tent, and used spirit arts to make Latifa fall into a deeper sleep; it was okay to separate a little without her crying at night.

He wandered aimlessly in the surroundings while keeping it at a safe distance where he could instantly deal with whatever happened in their camp grounds.

Somehow his mind was awfully calm.

The night wind that touched his body was just what he needed to refresh his mind.

Maybe being in contact with a little night wind would have some effect on tomorrow; that was what he thought.

When he discovered a rock that he decided was a suitable place to sit down, Rio sat on the rock.

It was not like he was thinking about anything; he was just absent-mindedly gazing at the scenery of the quiet forest.

The forest at night was awfully quiet.

The potential of being attacked by a wild beast was not that high, compared to a monster.

In the first place, if the wild animals possessed any intelligence it

was common that, save for unavoidable cases, they avoided battles.

The animals only attacked other wild beasts in cases such as protecting their child or hunting. In those cases they would start actively attacking like a monster.

Though monsters were somehow aggressive toward the other races, as a result of them absolutely not trying to hide their bloodlust, it was possible to notice them the moment they entered his search range; particularly so, in this camping ground.

Suddenly, Rio sensed that someone had entered his search range.

Rio was astonished since they were already so close to that place.

That was because their presence was extremely thin, compared to general beasts.

（…….Wolf？）

The owner of that presence entered into Rio’s field of view.

It was one big wolf, that exuded a faint silver light.

He almost couldn’t sense the particular characteristics of the beast; its presence was too thin, almost like an inorganic being.

It was almost like it was not a living being; that was what Rio thought.

Coincidentally, Rio knew of something similar to this case somewhere.

Rio firmly locked his line of sight so he wouldn’t miss any movements from the wolf.

And then, all of a sudden, the wolf shone; it was a torrent of light that illuminated the surrounding area.

（SHIMATTA！）[191]

His field of vision was dyed by white light; Rio instantly closes his eyes.

He temporarily lost his sight.

However, the rest of his senses were safe.

At that time, suddenly, Rio sensed something rapidly getting closer, from outside of his radar area*. [10]

Furthermore, they were coming in large numbers.

It seemed they were waiting in another place, outside of Rio's sonar search*. [11]

During that time, for some reason the wolf's presence before him vanished.

（This tactic like action….. it's not a beast. Could it be the owner of the smell that Latifa mentioned?）

Rio then guessed at the true identity of the attackers.

And then, as predicted beforehand, in that place he came into contact with them.

But he had not guessed that they will come this fast, and with the intent to attack.

Latifa could sense the other party from their lingering smell at a distance; could it be that the other party could also do the same thing as her? Or else, could it be that they have a different method to sense the coming of Rio's party? It wasn't the time to think about that.

While thinking about as many possible cases, Rio retreated back to the tent where Latifa was sleeping.

「Oi! Wait a minute, you're the demi-human tribe, right? 」

Rio shouted in a loud voice when he sensed the arrival of the other party in that place. He tried to get their attention to forestall them.

Because it happened during a battle situation, he didn't have the leisure to use polite words.

However, could it be that they didn't hear his voice? Or were they

simply just ignoring his question? Maybe they didn't understand Rio's language? The signs of their movements didn't cease at all.

(It's not strange for these fellows to understand human language, if they're alert to the human race. Then, could it be that they heard but deliberately ignored me? Don't tell me they're not expecting me….. to be a companion)

While he was still considering his situation, the group maintained their strong approach.

Then, from inside the group, one person broke out and rapidly got closer to Rio.

Rio, with his eyes closed, faced that person.

「!? 」

And then, he was surprised by the opposite party's appearance.

But, the other party kept approaching Rio.

There was no mistake about it, the other party was going to attack Rio.

When he felt that hostility of the opponent swelled up, Rio stepped away diagonally to them.

By the sounds of the attack, relying on the air flow, he guessed that his enemy was attacking bare-handedly.

Though it did not mean that his opponent do not carry weapons, right now there was no intention of killing him yet.

「As I said, WAIT A MINUTE ! You're demi-humans, right? 」

Before his opponent continued to the next attack, Rio tried to forestall it.

And then, from a different location to the enemy in front of him, someone shouted something in a language that was unknown to Rio. The movements of his opponent also stopped on hearing that voice.

「We don't want to be called by that name, you know」

Following that, the person talked to Rio in the human language.

When he thought that his opponent understood human language, Rio smiled lightly.

And from that voice, Rio knew that his opponent was actually a girl, around his age.

「I apologize for that.　Then, what should I call you? Beast man, Elf, or Dwarf?」

Rio asked the girl once again.

「……..Our pack is the people of spirit*」[12]

In response to Rio's quick apology, the owner of the voice answered shortly.

Somehow she also had the intention of conversing with Rio.

And then, from the reply just now, he guessed that every race and organization in this place was called the people of spirit.

「Then, please hear me, O people of spirit. What is your objective? 」

「We came to repel you since the spirits have been making a noise about tresspassers in our territory.. It seems that you had already kidnapped one of us.」

The girl said that, while sending a stare towards the tent in which Latifa was sleeping.

From the second half of her speech that was filled with hostility, it looked like there was some misunderstanding, that Rio came here for slave hunting.

「Then, can you take care of protecting that child for me？　」

「Take care of her? That's obvious, isn't it! To brazenly said that after you kidnap her …」

Her anger reached Rio.

The situation had developed down a complicated route; Rio mentally clicked his tongue.

「Please wait a minute. I have something to say about that matter…」

And, when Rio was about to talk about his circumstances, in words that Rio couldn't comprehend, the voice of a different girl (than the one he's spoken to) resounded from the direction of the tent.

In that instant, her anger swelled up and she attacked, suddenly landing a critical blow to Rio's abdomen.

「GAH」

Though his body was strengthened, Rio was being negligent due to their continued conversation. It was still not enough to absorb the impact of that sudden blow; Rio received damage that almost made him faint in agony.

（What brute strength…… Am I gonna be killed!?）

Even though he couldn't get away from that sudden blow, for him to get damaged, despite his already strengthened body.

That kind of power may be enough to pierce a thin teppan*. [13]

Rio's body easily flew through the air, and then crash landed on the ground.

He surveyed the surroundings with his sight, that finally returned. It was vague, but he saw around him many people of spirit, who were keeping themselves at a fixed distance from him.

From every direction he could see elves, who had set their bows and were aiming at him; beastmen holding swords and daggers; and dwarves hefting their axes and halberds.

They numbered at least 30 people.

And from among them, four people stood close to Rio.

A girl that looked like a blond haired elf; A girl that looked like a dwarf with flaming hair; A silver haired wolf girl, and a winged girl

with ash colored hair.

The three seemed around the same age as Rio, while the last one looked about twelve years older than him.

The one that attacked Rio was the winged woman.

She was glaring at Rio with an unpleasant expression, as if cursing him to death.

The rest of the people of spirit were also looking at him with similar eyes. [14]

In some respect it was like they were criticizing Rio, or scorning him for something somewhere about himself; it was a look that contained that kind of feeling.

（I didn't expect that their hostility went this far……）

Rio smiled wryly, coaxing himself for that recognition.

If he had stayed beside Latifa and explained to them, maybe they would have come to an understanding, that thought suddenly surfaced in his mind, then he fainted. [15]

Inside his dimmed consciousness, Rio sensed that winged girl was approaching in order to restrain him.

He tried to raise his fighting spirit, but only managed to stand up a little. The damage to his abdomen was too great, and it completely suppressed Rio. [16]

Just like that, Rio was struck on the nape of his neck, and completely fainted. [17]

And then, something caught the attention of the wolf girl and the winged girl. In a panicked state, the elf girl gave first-aid to Rio, and straped handcuffs to Rio, who was a spirit art user.

The winged girl carried Rio, while a different beastman carried Latifa. Then together, they gathered and headed off in the same direction.

Notes

1. Latifa speaking in broken grammar, so I left it as it is

2. This cooking WN gives me so many dinner ideas

3. Latifa said this in japanese, so I won't translate it to english to differentiate it with (let's eat), the reason is because the language from another world is closer to english

4. Riajuu just explode!!!

5. WARNING!!! This is clearly a flag

6. Flag? it must be a flag right?

7. no mosquitos?, what kind of world is this?] [ED: The best kind.

8. I can imagine it, LOLI BODY PILLOW!!!!] [PF: What would that look like?

9. FINALLY GET A CHANCE TO SAY THAT ALOUD, by the way it's meaning is "Oh, Crap"

10. can't held myself back from this one, it's actually "search range"

11. This time it was me. Still actually "search range"

12. you will know why later. BTW have a better name for(精霊の民)?

13. Iron plate, it's not bending, it's PIERCING a teppan, do you know how hard 1 millimeter teppan is? it's really hard

14. they said "You DAMN LOLICON] [PF: not really a lolicon since he isn't much older and she would be over 21 with both lives

15. why you can't just fainted and save me from this kind of sorrow?

16. finally the author used "Fighting Spirit" for the first time

17. now how long do you think this process of fainting?

Chapter 21

You Who I Met in my Dream

Rio woke up in a room that he was not familiar with.

His body felt sluggish, as if he was catching a cold. That was the worst feeling.

When he tried to lift his body and confirm his situation, an intense pain ran through his abdomen.

「!!!」

Rio immediately tried to bring his hands towards the injury, to treat it with spirit arts, only to find that he was shackled.

Moreover, the shackles carried similar effects to the ones that he wore in the Bertram prison, a long time ago.

It obstructed the flow of magical power in his body and disturbed it.

Clicking his tongue at this situation, Rio laid on his back and send his sights towards the ceiling.

Moonlight came into the room via small windows in the corner of the room. However, it was only dimly illuminating the place.

In that darkness, his abdomen was throbbing with pain.

Until the pain lessened, he thought that it's better to stay put.

When he was out, it also seemed that the clothes that he wore, and his belongings, were stripped off.

To put it simply, he was currently only wearing his underwear. [TL : KYAAAAA!—>Shotacon oneechan voice resounded from the background]

It was cold.

That was because of the wind, that was coming inside from the windows. Due to that the temperature inside the room lowered and made it as cold as outside.

The time right now was like just before spring.

It was night and with dawn still yet to come, the temperature inside the room easily fell below 10 celsius.

Though he could raise the his temperature even by just moving his body a little, the pain in his abdomen was preventing him from doing so.

'Let's just rely on natural healing.'

He could only endure it while quietly thinking so.

And just like that, somehow a long time passed.

The chilling sensation on his skin gradually reached its peak, but it also simultaneously made him recall feelings of comfort.[11]

Sleepy…

Am I going to fall asleep like this?

That was what he thought.

But, he would surely catch a cold if he slept like that, so he struggled to keep his eyes open, for the sake of keeping his consciousness awake.

While repeating that several times, he felt that putting effort in his eyes to stay awake become longer and longer; without his noticing, he fell asleep.

「Haru-kun」

———N?

「Wake up already~, Haru-kun」

He dearly missed that way of calling him. Stirred by that pleasant

voice, Haruto slowly raised his heavy eyelids.

Reflected in his eyes was the ceiling of the room where he lived a long time ago, and the worried face of his childhood sweetheart.

「Ah, Haru-kun, you're up!」

When the girl saw that he finally opened his eyes, a blissful smile bloomed on her face.

With only that alone, it made a kind of warmth spread inside his body, and warmed his heart.

「What is it……? That was my long awaited high-quality sleep」

Casually looking at the clock inside his room, it was still some time before morning.

「'What is it', you can't do that, Haru ~. Today is the excursion day, you know. That's why, you must wake up! 」

That was right.

That day was the first excursion day, during their first year in elementary school.

Because of the his excitement, he had a very difficult time getting to sleep last night. That was what Haruto remembered.

「N—, Good night then」

But, looking at the worried face of his childhood friend made him want to tease her.

The truth was, his head had already cleared when he remembered about that excursion trip.

「You-, You can't do that ~. You said that in the bus, we're going to sit next to each other, you kno~w!」

It was an expression that looked like she would burst into tears at anytime; that girl shook Haruto's body.

「N~~」

And Haruto answered her with somewhat spiritless voice.

Instantly, the girl's restless face assaulted him from his bedside.

「UUUuu, Geez. JUST WAKE UP ALREADY!」

As expected, that time, when he went to wake up slowly, that girl was getting atop of Haruto, from above the futon.

「GUHA.　Wa, wait! Wait a minute! I give up! I will wake up　　!　」

Appearing from inside the futon, due to unforseen impact, his childhood sweetheart looked at him with a proud face.

The expression of the girl when counterattacking, made the bud of mischief sprout in Haruto's mind.

「Ah, Haru-kun!」

He dragged her inside the futon, and tightly hugged her in there.

It was warm.

The face of the girl before him.

He could feel, while she was beside him, her breathing and her temperature.

It was really nice and warm.

「UU~」

The girl's face flushed red and she was faltering.

His face was also flushed red.

She thought that Haruto was very bold.

「Then, is it good to sleep like this?. Good night～」

Then playing dumb to hide his embarassment.

If it was going as it was, they wouldn't need to go to their excursion trip.

He thought that was an excellent idea.

「Please wake up already」

Though, despite of that, someone still tried to wake Haruto. No, it was Rio.

Who was it?

That was a girl's voice.

But, it was not his childhood friend's voice.

If that was the case, Rio instantly understood.

Well, anyone was fine. He continued to pretend he was asleep while hugging his childhood sweetheart.

That was what Rio thought while quietly putting more strength into his arms.

But, as if something restricted it, he couldn't move his hands.

And then, somehow, the warmth of his childhood sweetheart vanished.

「U~m, please wake up」

Rio opened his eyes.

The figure of his childhood sweetheart till just now, suddenly disappeared.

Instead, in her place, was a silver haired wolf girl and an extremely cute blonde haired elf.

Instead of the warmth of his childhood sweetheart, he felt weary.

Feeling a sense of loss, his earlier expression vanished from his face.

A~h, so that was a dream, then Rio recalled his current situation.

And then, lightly, tears fell from Rio's eyes.

It was because his sweetheart wasn't in this world.

Nevertheless, he actually still loved, her despite that.

Even though it was only in his dream, he could feel her warmth.

Just by recalling that sealed memory.

Re-opening the seal of his childhood sweetheart, made Rio know that it was difficult and he still had not give up on her.

He still wanted to meet her, till now.

He wanted to meet her, right now.

He really wanted to meet her and continue their conversation just now.

Just thinking about that was enough to make him want to cry, very much.

The elf and the girl become bewildered when they saw Rio in that state. [-_-]

Then he noticed something different, before he noticed, he was already covered with a blanket.

As expected, though they were from different races it seemed they couldn't bring themselves to steal a glance at the half-naked boy from the same age as them.

Thinking like that, Rio gave his usual bitter smile.

That time, a girl ran into the room from the opened jail doors.

It was Latifa.

And then, following her were the winged girl and flaming haired dwarf.

Latifa clung to Rio while letting out a "Waaa-waa" crying voice loudly.

Latifa repeatedly said「Onii-chan」「Onii-chan」「Don't leave me!」, in the human language.

Seeing Latifa in that state, somehow washed out Rio's previous sentiment, also made him completely forget about the pain in his abdomen. Just like that he was smiling wryly to Latifa. [2]

All the people in that place, that were looking at that scene, somehow their expressions were a little, no it was already considerably pale.

And then, an aged fox eared person entered that place.

「For some reason it has become quite noisy here, hasn't it. What happened in the jail this time? Is it that aforementioned human?」

While saying those words, in a language that was completely unknown to Rio, the woman surveyed the room and found Latifa.

「Hoo…… A girl from the same tribe . Though I can't see her, that kid is cute, isn't it?」

A sad smile floated on that old person's face when she saw Latifa.

And then, she instantly noticed Rio, who was being embraced by Latifa.

「Is he the rumoured human, that invaded our territory? Though the elders scheduled to hold an assembly this noon but, is there something wrong with him」

「That, it has something to do with this fox girl but……」

The silver haired wolf girl tried to explain the situation.

That Rio was trying to bring the restrained Latifa along with him to her hometown, by passing the barrier.

He was being misunderstood as a slave hunter because Rio disturbed the magical power in Latifa's body and made her fall into a deep sleep.

And then, a short time later, after they were back in their country, Latifa woke up at midnight and began to cry.

She was crying very loudly, especially when she noticed that Rio

wasn’t by her side.

After such difficulty, since the girl couldn’t speak the language of the Seirei no tami.

Then they hurriedly came back to the jail Rio was imprisoned in, to make sure about the situation. [3]

And then, Latifa instantly rushed to the room when she sniffed Rio’s smell.

「I see……」

—-

The old fox woman finished listening to everything and directed her gaze to Rio and Latifa.

「That girl, hasn’t she really become emotionally attached to him…….. ! 」

「You, you were all was so cruel to onii-chan.　Unforgivable」

He heard Latifa say those words, though her anger was conveyed in a broken Seirei no tami language.

「Mu, from the looks of it, it seems you can’t talk in our language. Nevertheless, this killing intent……」

It was too strong.

It was already beyond too strong.

It wasn’t something that should be able to come out from a girl of this age.

Everyone in that place was drenched in a cold sweat, except for Rio.

Appearing one step before them was the winged girl, as if protecting the other girls from the frizzly sensation, that was as if their skin roasted.

Thereupon, the one who restrained her was the hand of that Elder.

「My apologies. For the time being, let me hear your circumstances.

On top of that, I'm also apologising for our misunderstanding. First, we will untie that person. Will you be agree on that for now? 」

The Elder lowered her head deeply while persuading her.

「…….If that's the case, do it quickly. I'll kill you if you try to do something」

Latifa said that — the Elder's sincerity, it was uncertain whether it got through to her —- with eyes infused with killing intent.

「Umu…….. Are you the one that attached that to him, Ôfia? Then, it would take a while with my[washi] skill. Ôfia, please unfasten that handcuff」

The Elder gave an instruction to the elf girl.

「Na, elder ! Is that really alright? This fellow is human, right!? We also haven't heard his circumstances yet! 」

And, the winged girl quickly said that to the Elder.

「You fool. Accept the fact that the child is already emotionally attached to that human child. Treating someone like a criminal without hearing their circumstances is a violation towards the teachings of our Seirei no tami, that we are proud of. Ôfia, please do it quickly」

「U, understood」

The elf girl called Ôfia walked towards Rio.

Though he didn't understand the flow of the conversation, since he couldn't understand their language, Rio guessed the situation from the flow of the mood. Maybe his handcuff was going to be removed.

Just like that, he silently raised his hands.

Ôfia held out her hand on the handcuff on Rio's hand; light was emitted from that hand.

That was a beautiful light.

Rio was unintentionally fascinated by that light.

（This is spirit arts……）

That was entirely different, and yet looked like magic.

And, it was really different from Rio's spirit art, that was used by copying magic.

Though maybe it worked in a similar way to『Release Spell Magic(Dispel)』to unfasten the handcuff, it was not mimicking the flow of mana like『Release Spell Magic(Dispel)』, the one used by Rio.

Rio felt that Ôfia's spirit art had far more freedom than his spirit arts.

It differed greatly from him, who just copied the flow of mana from system contract ceremonies.

Her spirit arts was more direct, and yet, complex and more advanced.

Although Rio, up till now, has regularly mimicked magical phenomenon by manipulating mana, he always thought that, along with control of mana, system contracts were necessary to cause the phenomenon.[14]

But, it seemed he was mistaken by that kind of thinking.

（Could it be, that control of mana wasn't necessary for spirit arts？ No, that's not it. It doesn't mean that it's not limited by the need for controlling mana, from looking at the spirit art of the elf girl, from sometime ago. Where is the difference…… Could it be that image for the phenomenon is also important? Which reminds me, I couldn't understand how I did it but I was able to strengthen my body and physical ability. Was that because I imagine it like that*……）

Even while analyzing and ruminating about the essence of the skill that the girl used, Rio felt that this is the true spirit arts.

「Thank you very much」

Looking at his freed hands, though they might not understand human language, he expressed his gratitude to Ôfia.

「N, no. We are the ones that must apologise to you! 」

Hearing that, Ôfia frantically apologised and bowed her head down. |5|

She understood human language.

「Latifa, I'm okay, so retract your killing intent」

Rio said that to Latifa who was spreading her killing intent, as if intimidating their surroundings, till now.

「But ! 」

Latifa tightly grasped Rio's clothes. |6|

「It's fine already」

「……Uhm」

While he gently brushing Latifa's head, as if to calm her. Latifa slowly retracted her killing intent.

The Elder then began to talk immediately after confirming that the atmosphere inside the room had calmed.

「Well then, young man. Would you let us hear your story? … But not in a jail like this… Let's go to a room」

The Elder spoke to Rio in the human language.

'This place is a prison after all' While thinking that, Rio smiled wryly.

That was the second time he had gone to jail. While thinking that it was not that rare to experience it in his second life, Rio accepted the Elder's offer.

When he tried to stand up, he was attacked by a sudden pain in his abdomen. Rio knitted his eyebrows.

「Excuse me. Can you let me do some treatment for this injury? 」

「Mu, let me quickly do it for you.」

「No, its fine. I can do it myself」

From what he felt from the Elder, he didn't think that she would be unkind to him. But just to be safe, since this kind of treatment might not last, he thought that it was not wise to leave himself indebted to her, even if it was just a little.

Thinking like that, Rio refused the offer of the Elder who was just about hurried to start.

Rio applied his hand to his abdomen.

Though the basics of the flow of mana resembled the magic formula of『Healing Magic(Heal)』like usual, he recalled the spirit art that the girl used previously. Just like that, he controlled the mana while holding a strong image of healing in his head.

From the feeling of the lingering pain, maybe the damage reached his internal organs.　Maybe there was also a hemorrhage[17].

Naturally, though it also depended on the user, treating internal damage using『Healing Magic(Heal)』would take some time and was also quite difficult.

However, right now, he was using less magical power than usual; moreover he also felt that the healing speed was faster.

It looked like he succeeded in copying that girl's spirit art.

Rio was surprised, himself, that the progress was that big from just that small difference in technique .

Seeing him did that, the eyes of the Seirei no tami in that place also became filled with surprise. [18]

「That's, just now……？」

Their representative, Arthura, said that first[19].

「Spirit arts……Well, I thought that is what I've been doing till now, but is it not that different?」

Wanting to hear the opinions of the authentic spirit art users, Rio asked without hiding anything about his power.

「……Certainly, though it's a little unpolished, control of Odo, that's still spirit art……. You, what kind of contract and spirit is tied to you?」

「Contract with spirits？」

Rio inclined his neck in confusion, as if he didn't pick up her question.

Looking at that situation, Arthura judged that Rio didn't bind a contract with a spirit yet.

「Mu, for there to be a human so skilled in mana manipulation and isn't contracted with a spirit*？ You must be very loved by the spirits. How come ……..?」

Arthura had a complex expression, as if thinking about something.

「Ôfia, did you know something about this？」

「Uh, no. Only about his mana, I only know that it's loved very much by the spirit, just that…….」

The elf girl Ôfia said that with a bewildered face.

「Mu, to skillfully manipulate the mana, as if you're a high elf, and without contract at that」

「GAHA, GAHA」

At that time, Rio coughed violently and spat blood from his mouth. [TL : Eh, did it just changed genre to wuxia?]

「Onii-chan！」

Seeing that scene, Latifa cried in worry.

「A, Are you alright!!？」

Looking at Rio spitting blood, the peoples of spirit also called to him in worry.

「Yeah, it's alright, it's just coagulated blood from my internal bleeding」

Rio said that as if it was only a trifling matter.

「I see, then it will be good if we quickly go to someplace where you can slowly relax and rest, right?* It's already close to dawn. Come to think of it, what's your name boy? I'm called Arthura [10], the eldest of this country of Seirei no tami 」

「My name is Rio, nice to meet you」

「I see. Well then, Rio-dono, I will guide you to the room. Follow me」

Going along with the Elder, Rio left that place.

Notes

1. 心地よい comfortable; pleasant;《fml》agreeable; By being in extreme situation, body instinctively remembers and amplifies whatever good feeling he felt

2. Is your love only on that level? to easily defeated by a LOLI

3. he's already imprisoned twice due to some misunderstanding] [PF: at least this one has some reasoning behind it instead of rage inducing reasons] [ED: If it keeps happening people are going to think there's a reason for it][TL : he's loved by prison goddess

4. Remember he was ridiculed for being unable to use magic in the academy.

5. At this point, Ôfia was feeling scared of the killing intent and felt guilty.] [TL : behind you, behind you

6. Wasn't he only wearing a blanket and underwear?

7. internal bleeding

8. For a different reason.

9. WTF, I don't see anyone with that name before] [ED: I don't think it's ever been mentioned… Just go with it?

10. Arthura

Chapter 22
Apology

Rio explained his circumstances with Latifa to Arthura and the others.
That he was on a journey towards Yagumo.

That Latifa was once brought up as a slave of humans.

About how he encountered Latifa in the middle of his journey.

And how he released Latifa from slavery.

And that he planned to deliver Latifa to the people of spirit.
「As I thought, this side is completely in the wrong, isn't it? My apologies……..」
After listening to the whole story, Arthura lowered her head with a sad expression.

Latifa, who was the subject of the talk, either because she was tired or maybe because she had given up on understanding the complicated story, slept through the story on Rio's lap. No matter how you say it, that became the best evidence of her attachment to Rio.
「My dear Uzuma, it is not an exaggeration for me to say that the matter has gotten this complicated because of your rashness.Would you at least let us hear your reasons? [11] 」
Arthura asked Uzuma, the winged woman, in people of spirit language.
「That, from what I heard from Oufia, she saw a trace of abuse and something that caused her ODO disordered and made her fall into a deep sleep, that guy ……. I got the wrong idea about the things he did to her ……. then got enraged」
Against her will, Uzuma was forced to give testimony on her reason for attacking Rio. A Large amount of cold sweat was rising on her

forehead.[2]

「From hearing the story till the end, it seems that the kid was put into a deep sleep so she wouldn't cry at night. In the first place, you're always jumping to the wrong conclusion, despite always saying that you will think through things a bit more[3]. Striking without thinking of the consequence, this idiot[4]. How can the warrior chief be such a sorry person? Isn't most of this problem your fault? Didn't you think that it was unnatural or strange? N?」
「My deepest apologies! E, esteemed elder. 」

Uzuma was shrinking smaller and smaller as she apologised to Arthura.
「Don't apologise to me. You better reflect on your misdeed carefully in your heart, your punishment will be decided in the elder council today. For now, be good and properly apologise to Rio-dono. Understood? 」
「Yes……」

「That aside, Sara, Oufia, Alma, that's including all of you too. Sooner or later you will also become the leaders of this country. It's a sad matter for me that, despite your training, you still failed to stop that lone Uzuma from rampaging」

「Ye, Yes! 」
The wolf, elf, and dwarf girl twitched when she said their names respectively.
「Though there's actually no need to give you guys a punishment, I wish that you reflect on this case in your heart」

「Y, Yes!」
The three girls lowered their head so deeply.
「My apologies. Rio-dono, I was too absorbed in giving those girls a lesson」
Arthura, that finished with her scolding, bowed her head to Rio again.

Though Rio pitied the quartet that seemed like they just got scolded, he just watched them silently, since he couldn't understand any of it.
「By the way Rio-dono, by some chance, you're not catching a cold

right？」
Arthura, who noticed Rio's bad complexion, pointed it out.
「Er~m, just a little cold……」[5]
Rio, with a glance, showed his appearance of only wearing his underwear beneath the blanket. Arthura sighed on seeing his sorry state.
「……That's also our fault, isn't it? We will immediately prepare a special elf medicine. The elders meeting will begin after the break of dawn. After that, there will be an official apology from the whole people of spirit. Till that time, please sleep on that bed」

「Thank you very much」
Looking at the bed pointed by Arthura, Rio gave his thanks.

That time, Uzuma's pale expression had already somehow abated, then she was saying something to the wolf girl. Sara starting to talking, translating Uzuma words.
「That, uh~m, Rio-sama, Uzuma's apologising to you……」
Uzuma was sitting in seiza, then pounded her head to the ground in a frantic state.

Otherwise known as DOGEZA. [6]
「About that, please also accept our apologies. For our unjust treatment towards the benefactor who protected our brethren.」
Sara, Oufia, and Alma also said their apologies to Rio in DOGEZA.
「……. Though it would be a lie if I said "don't worry about that", I accept your apology. Since at that time, there was also the possibility that I might inflict some injury to Uzuma-dono too.」
While he was surprised by the fact that this world also had DOGEZA culture in his memory, he felt uncomfortable having an elderly lady and girls of the same generation as him prostrate in front of him.

Nevertheless, it was still useless to think otherwise. It seemed it was also not a nice choice to make the matter worse, if he was to consider their future relationship.

While thinking of all that, Rio displayed his acceptance of their apologies.
After he drank the delivered elf medicine, Rio fell asleep. By the time he woke up, it was already noon.

When he tried to raise his body, he noticed that Latifa was sleeping by his side.

The cold in his body had completely gone.

It seemed that the effect of the elf medicine far exceeded human medicine. It had reached the point where it was useless to compare them.

As he was softly stroking Latifa's head, the door room was knocked.
「Yes. Please come in」
When the other side heard his reply, the door slowly opened.

Coming in was, the wolf girl, Sara, the elf girl, Oufia, and the dwarf girl, Alma.
「Good Morning」
The three that entered the room politely gave morning greetings.
「Is anything the matter？」
Rio asked the three that entered the room together.
「In the meeting this morning, we were temporarily appointed to take care of Rio-dono. So we have come to properly introduce ourselves again.」
Sara said that, representing the three of them.

As the eldest amongst them, she had somehow acted as their older sister-like figure on numerous occasions.

—-

「For the time being, please think of the three of us as Rio-sama's attendants in this village of seirei no tami[171]. Please take care of us from now on」

There was only a small number of people who could talk in the human language among the seirei no tami.

Only those who stood at the governing level would be able to speak in the human language.

Thus, the fact that they were already acquainted with Rio aside, Oufia, Sara and Alma were assigned as Rio's caretakers because of their ability to speak in human language.

「I will also be troubling you, please take care of me from now on. Pleased to meet you」

Rio said that while nodding his head in the proper manner.

「N, no, we're the one who should say that」

Though for a different reason, as if being embarassed by something, those three also bowed their head down. Their movements looked stiff.

It was as if they were being overly aware of him; or to be exact, they were in some respects feeling guilty towards Rio.

「The news will come immediately. The elder conference was held in our hamlet till just now」

As if she had finally sorted out her feelings, Sara then spoke out with a tense face.

「It was decided that we will deliver our gratitude and apology to Rio-sama formally. It's been arranged for this evening and we were told to inform Rio-sama about this during lunch, if you had already woken up」

「Understood」

Though he was feeling a bit uneasy that he would be apologized to in a formal occasion, he understood that it was necessary.

Leaving that aside, right now he was more interested in the meals of the seirei no tami.

「And then, the lunch is already prepared. Would you like have it now?」

「Thank you very much. Certainly, please.」

He gave an immediate reply to such a heaven sent offer.

「Yes. Then, shall we also bring the portion for Latifa-chan?」

「That's right. Since I think that she will soon wake up」

Rio let out a gentle smile whilst looking at the soundly sleeping Latifa.

「Understood. Then, we will bring it immediately. Please, Oufia, Alma」

「Uhm！」

「Yes」

Oufia let out an innocent smile and Alma obeyed it in formal manner; they respectively answered and left the room.

Leaving only Rio and Sara, along with the still sleeping Latifa.

Silence fell on those two for a short while.

「That, Latifa-chan was a former slave, right？」

Some time later, Sara asked that question with sad face.

「Yes, she was.」

Rio answered with short nod.

Sara mentioned Latifa as the topic.

「Could it be that Rio-sama was an acquaintance of Latifa-chan when she was still a slave？」

「No. Though I can guess what kind of treatment she received, I never asked her, since I don't want her to remember the time when she was a slave」

「I see…… Err, If you're okay with that, could you please tell me the extent of what Rio-sama knows about her」

「Are you sure, it's not an interesting story, you know？」

He wouldn't tell the story if it was just to satisfy her curiousity. So he implied that in his answer.

「……Yes。But, nevertheless I still want to know it.」

Sara looked at Rio, a strong will dwelled in her eyes.

「Understood」

Her strong will reached Rio, he then told Sara about the kind of treatment Latifa received, also his own conjecture.

At first the emotion was thin.

Catching sight of the traces of abuse all over her body.

He guessed that she might have received serious wounds during battle practice.

The things that she was doing, something similiar to an assasin.

The thought that maybe she also didn't receive a decent meal.

The thing that she also had an extreme trauma.

He told Sara all of what he roughly knew about Latifa.

Though Sara become perplexed when she was told that assasinating Rio was also Latifa duty, after he finished with the story, her blood boiled as if remembering what anger is, and her body slowly started to tremble.

「THAT GIRL IS NOT AN OBJECT！　THAT……！」

Sara raised her voice as she couldn't find something to vent her anger.

「That's right」

Even Rio also felt the same thing as her.

In her case, she was filled with strong emotion for her brethren, so it was only natural that she held even more strong emotion.

「Nevertheless ……. eavesdropping isn't a very good habit, you know」

Rio said that while turning towards the opening of the door.

「……Muuu~, so I was discovered. You're a sharp one, right. I'm sorry.」

After saying that, Arthura stepped into the room, along with Alma and Oufia who were carrying the meals for two persons.

Sara was so absorbed in hearing the story that she didn't notice those three getting closer.

「Then, about that child's story. I also have something to say to Rio-dono.」

Arthura said that with a mysterious expression.

「Well, it's just a possibility, but, that child, maybe, is my great-grandchild」

Rio eyes slightly widened when he heard that.

「My granddaughter dissappeared more than ten years ago ……. Originally, she was an active and playful child. At first, I had thought that, maybe she was somewhere around, wandering aimlessly because she got tired of this hamlet. However, she never came back. Just like that, there was also no news about her, I thought that she was attacked by beast or monster …….. 」

—-

Arthura threw a glance at Latifa who was sleeping while holding onto Rio's clothes.

「Her face, that I missed, strangely overlapped with this child's face. I wanted to hear her mother's name, but at the same time I'm also afraid … This child, her mother has already passed away, right?」

「That's right, I heard that she's already passed away」

「I see…… 」

Arthura let out an extremely sad expression.

「N……Onii-chan……」

At that time, somehow reacting to the conversation that was happening, Latifa slightly opened her eyes and woke up.

「Did we wake you up? Good morning, Latifa. It's time for meal」

「Un. Good morning. Meal, eat ……」

Latifa said that, speaking like a spoiled kid with drowsy eyes.

「Rio-dono, my gratitude for you」

That look of Latifa snuggling to Rio, looked just like a happy pampered child.

Witnessing that scene, Arthura deeply bowed her head in gratitude.

「No, not at all. To be thanked like this … 」

Rio's face grimaced a little when he was thanked by Arthura.

In the first place, he hadn't plan to save her and then come here with her.

Certainly, certainly, after knowing Latifa's circumstances, he had become something close to her guardian.

But, to accept her gratitude because of it, just like that, Rio wasn't as thick-skinned.

Though she noticed the little changes in Rio's expression, even with her long-life experience, she still couldn't fully grasp what kind of emotion Rio had right then.

「Fumu, your long awaited meal will get cold. Go on, you should eat」

In order to change the mood in that place, Arthura urged them to eat.

After that, Latifa who had completely awoken started on her meal with bright and carefree smile.

Rio also started his meal, a little after her.

Though it was composed of dishes that she saw for the first time, it seems to be to Latifa's liking.

Even the flavor was satisfying for Rio.

After that meal, Sara, Oufia, and Alma went on to deepen their relationship with Latifa.

Rio and Arthura watched their conversation while standing a bit away from them.

Because talking to girls close to her age was something new to her, at first Latifa felt awkward and couldn't chat without Rio beside her. Despite that, she quickly got along with them.

Just like that, time flowed by and it soon became dusk.

Leaving Latifa under the supervision of Sara and the other, with Arthura as the guide, Rio arrived at the room where the elders of the seirei no tami held their council.

The meeting room of the elders was built on the top floor of the tree house in a noticeably great tree.

Rio had observed and got to know the lifestyle of the hamlet of the seirei no tami, while on his way to the meeting room.

Their living style was completely integrated with nature. Inside the forest, they constructed their residences or tree houses from stone or clay.

Rio was looking at the buildings with great interest, it was truly a fairytale-like scene.

Climbing the spiral stairs that encircled the circumference of the tree, the great tree that released overwhelming presence came into sight.

This was possibly the tree that he and Latifa was originally headed towards, before his capture.

Strangely, Rio felt it was especially strong for him in the seirei no tami's place.

Before long they arrived at the top floor and entered the room where the elders were waiting.

In the room, close to 30 elders of the seirei no tami were seated on the lined up tree chairs in a U-formation.

Sitting near the front entrance were an elf and dwarf, who looked mature with age, and there was only one seat that was vacant.

「Well then Rio-dono, please sit here」

When Arthura urged Rio to sit on the chair near the vicinity of the entrance, he sat on the vacant chair in the inner side of the front entrance.

「O-child of human. We had heard about this incident. The matter about you; that you released our captured brethren from slavery, and then, the matter about the misunderstanding that was caused by our brethren and caused much trouble for you. We want to express our deepest gratitude. Thank you」

When the aged elf that sat next to Arthura said that, all the elders that were present stood from their chairs and bowed their heads to Rio.

From their serious tone and that conduct, Rio could feel their sincerity.

Alas, he felt a little uncomfortable with so many people bowing their heads to him at once.

「First, I'm availing myself of your gratitude, I have received it. It came to my knowledge that there's unerasable some black history between seirei no tami and human race. Maybe the actions that you take, for all of your brethren, is caused by such sad history. I can say for sure that it was the accumulation of my tribe's evil deeds up till now. That said, I didn't receive any irreparable damage from that incident. For me, as long the misunderstanding was cleared, there's no problem. Please lift your heads」

Rio answered with same level of courtesy.[18]

The elders raised their heads in a perplexed state on hearing his words. They were staring at Rio with a surprised expression.

「Since you have said it like that, then we are most grateful. However, despite that, it is a fact that we had repaid your favour with enmity from our side.. Therefore, as compensation, we will like

to grant some of your wish.……」

He seemed troubled in some respect, but the aged elf uttered those words with a solemn expression.

「My ……. wish？ 」

「Rio-dono. Syldra ……. This man was saying that he wants to express our gratitude for rescuing Latifa. Also, as a way of making amends for the hardship we caused to Rio-dono due to misunderstanding, that's what he meant. But, the rest of us could not fathom what Rio-dono, who is a human, would want to have. Do you have a wish that you would like granted? And somehow, our fellows are scared to hear what kind of wish you will make」

Hearing Arthura's words, starting with the aged elf Syldra, then the other elders, all had embarassed expressions on their face.

From those same words, Rio's face finally emit a look of understanding.

—-

From the point of view of seirei no tami, they considered the humans, who has always treated their brethren like slaves, as vile creatures.

Because of that, they had misgivings about the promised wish.

Even though they didn't know what a human might desire for, they still had to give their gratitude.

To ask him directly what he wants in such a straight manner seemed to be Arthura's own decision.

That must have taken a lot of courage for them.

「I see…… Well then, please take care of Latifa for me」

Rio said that, as it has been his reason from the very beginning.

Hearing the words, the elders looked at Rio and couldn't hide their expressions of disbelief.

「Only ……. that？ 」

Syldra spoke with dumbfounded tone.

「Uhm, I vaguely guessed that Rio-dono wasn't a selfish person. But Rio-dono, that is what we had already planned to do since the very beginning ……., if you ask for that, then it doesn't make it a wish.」

Arthura said that with a little shock in the tone of her voice.

「I understand.　But, because I don't think that girl can quickly get accustomed to living in this hamlet. Therefore, I really wish for you to truly take care of that girl, as a most important matter」

A moment of silence descended into the room.

「KUKUKU. This guy is a real masterpiece! That human over there, he's giving a priority to another race; someone who was unrelated to him rather, than his own profit! 」

Following that, the aged dwarf that was sitting next to Syldra broke into laughter.

「He's just like how I had described, Dominique. Rio-dono is an extremely rational human. He also has a fine personality, so he will never think about making any absurd demands. 」[191]

「Well Arthura, you know that because you had met and talked to him personally. An unknown, add to that a human! Of course anyone would become wary, heh!」

The aged dwarf called Dominique said that with pleasant tone to Arthura.

「I'm pleased, Boy! If it suits you, I will give my great-grand daughter, Alma, as your bride! No need to feel reserved. By all means, just say it」[TN : Alma flag GET!!!]

Dominique declared that in loud voice.

「I wonder about that. I wish that you were a little more greedy. It would feel bad for us if we didn't at least compensate you for the

help and the unfair treatment we'd given you.」

Arthura also agreed with Dominique.

「That's right. Do you really have nothing you wish for? 」

Syldra expressed that with a sigh, while looking towards Arthura and Dominique whose drowned in their own world.

「……. Hmm, that's true. When you said it like that then I would like to get some food ingredients from the hamlet. I also want you to teach me the things that I need to know about Seirei no tami, and maybe your language? I'm a little interested in it. That's about it, I think? Ah, and it's fine if it's until Latifa becomes accustomed to this hamlet, can you allow me to stay here for the while?」

Rio said his wish with a gesture like he was pondering about something.

「This lad truly isn't greedy at all ……. 」

Arthura said that with admiration tone in her voice.

「No, actually it's nothing like that ……. I'm greedy in my own way」 [TN : with loli, and food]

「That's not what I mean. You have too little of the desire, which is characteristic of your race, the human race」

「Haa …… 」

Rio showed an expression like he was not fully grasping what that mean.

「About those requests, I think we can manage them. But what is it that you want to know from us?」

Syldra asked about the details regarding Rio's second wish.

「That's right, it would be something like the way to use spirit arts, and then learning the knowledge of the seirei no tami that is useful in everyday life. Of course I won't teach a third party about what I learn, nor would I thoughlessly disclosed the information.」

「The wish sounds fine to me. Are there any objections？」

All members shook their head immediately after Syldra said that.

「Fumu, then we will work on those requests. Are only those enough?」

After Syldra confirmed that there was no objections, he asked for Rio's final confirmation.

「Yes. Please.」

Rio said that while lightly bowing his head.

「Well then, let's continue. This is concerning the punisment for warrior chief, Uzuma. According to our law, the punishment must be decided by Rio-dono. Do you have anything on your mind?」

Rio pondered after hearing Syldra words.

Uzuma stood respecfully in the corner of the room.

「No, nothing par …… I personally think the punishment isn't necessary, but if we have to do it, then I will just follow the local custom.」

「…… Really, our worry was unnecessary. I'm sorry. Rio-dono, our doubt has sullied your pride. Once again we deeply apologize for our crude behaviour」

Because of wonder towards what kind of punishment will be given to Uzuma, Rio could only have a little cramped smile.

「No, since I don't particularly care about such matter」

「Fumu, we're really grateful for that. Well then, I wonder if it were okay for us to decide a punishment for Uzuma?」

「That's right」

In the end, it's announced that the punishment for Uzuma was living under house arrest for a while.

After that, receiving self-introduction of the elders, along with a

modest banquet, just like that Rio deepened his friendship with the elders of the seirei no tami.

Notes

1. Uzuma here's in the same position as Asura, but it doen't mean that they have same age]

2. Notes 有無を言わせずに has the same meaning as 無理やり, i.e being forced against one's will.]

3. thinking more carefully, it's idiom I guess

4. attacking without thinking the consequences

5. warmed by a loli's passionate hug

6. Humblest form of apologizing, the variant are, Sliding DOGEZA, slide and roll DOGEZA, and many more that mastered by Oga father from Beelzebub]

7. previously used people of spirit, waiting for the result of the poll for the time being.
   TL : now using seirei no tami

8. that courtesy caused a huge headache for me

9. it's the other world human that was extremely tooo irrational

Chapter 23

Spirit Art

Three days since they arrived at the country of Seirei no tami, in the outskirts of the village, Rio was receiving lessons on spirit arts from Arthura.

「 Rio-dono, I have something to ask before I start teaching you spirit arts. Based on the color of your hair, are you by any chance someone from the eastern country? 」

「Both my parents were. I think their country was called Yagumo. As for my birthplace, it was the country called Bertram in the west」

Hearing those words, Arthura had a convinced look on her face.

「Most likely, Rio-dono's parents excelled in spirit arts.」

「……What do you mean？ 」

Rio inquired about that statement, that was if to say that the aptitude for spirit arts was decided by the birthplace.

「Then I will have to explain first about MANA and ODO. Rio-dono, do you have any idea what MANA and ODO are? 」[1]

「No, I'm not」

Rio slightly shook his head.

「Fumu. ODO is the life force present inside the body of living creatures, whereas MANA is the force of nature in the world」

Rio looked at Arthura and waited for the continuation of the explanation. He wasn't able to grasp it with only that vague description.

「But, that term, unless you hear something more about it then you can't understand it, right? The thing that humans call magical power is ODO. You can actually see ODO with your eyes can't you, Rio-dono,? 」

She seemed to have noticed it somehow, so Rio nodded. He felt a little surprised at Arthura, who guessed correctly that he could see ODO.

「As for MANA, it's hard to explain in words, you have to use your own eyes to see it. I'm sure that Rio-dono who practices spirit arts, can also perceive MANA. So, do you feel something with your keen senses? 」

「……. By releasing ODO from your body, it can sharpen your senses. After doing that, you will sense some kind of existence that can't be seen with your eyes, filling the atmosphere.」[2]

As he listened, Rio released ODO from his body.

And then, in the world he perceived using the light of ODO, Rio sensed it; things that floated in the air like small particles.

Those were the things that he could sense since long ago, since the time ODO light radiated from his body the first time he awoke in this world.

「As I thought, you can perceive it too. That calm and steady flow of ODO… Not to mention, the amount of ODO that Rio-dono hold is also large, for a human」

Looking at the light of ODO that was emitting from Rio, Arthura let out a small smile.

「MANA overflows throughout the world, as long as nature exist. Those very things themselves are what we call the force of nature. Magic manipulates the way the world works with MANA, it's the same for spirit arts.」

'Then, what is the difference between the two?' To that question which naturally came up in Rio's mind, Arthura then supplied the answer.

「The difference is in how the person manipulates the MANA. With regards to magic, it is the act of manipulating MANA by invoking a system contract that was carved inside the body. On the other hand, for spirit art, the caster manipulates MANA by imprinting his image of the world-altering phenomenon on the MANA directly using his ODO.」

After hearing that explanation, in contrast to magic which was a program that was prepared in advance to meddle with MANA by using a system contract, spirit arts don't meddle with MANA; it manually controlled it-that was Rio's interpretation.

「In the first place, spirit arts can be used by anyone who can sense MANA. However, most of people in human race have weak perception of MANA. Thus, magic was created for humans, who couldn't perceive MANA, so that they could use an imitation of spirit art. More than 1000 years ago, the people who called themselves the seven gods gave those techniques to the human race, who made their residence in the western part of the continent.」

「Seven gods ……? Weren't there only six gods? 」

If it was the so called six gods, Rio also knew about them.

After all, they were the gods in the creed that the humans who lived in the west believe in.

「The seventh was banished by the other six. It occurred long before god-demon war which happened more than 1000 years ago …… Its existence was erased from human history」

Arthura said that while looking towards the horizon, as if thinking about something.

Rio was intrigued as to why the people of Seirei no tami knew about that seventh person.

But, there wouldn't be an end if he asked that. For now, he decided to listen to the explanation about spirit art and stowed away that question for later.

「We also recognize the usefulness of system contracts. It's just that,

we don't use it because it can also give rise to undesirable phenomenon, unlike normal spirit arts. The skills that meddled with MANA are what was originally called magic. In the beginning, system contracts were spirit tools that the humans developed, tools that can invoke magic or create barriers.」

Arthura spoke about the original way to use system contracts.

「But, taking system contracts into the body meant remodeling the body itself. The more system contracts were carved into the body, the more unnatural it becomes. The result was, the body then becomes completely impossible to learn spirit arts」

Rio had a so called satisfied look on his face, he finally understood the reason most users of spirit arts weren't human.

「Especially the humans living in the West. As a result, spirit art users are quite rare over there. Then as for those living in Eastern continent, they become masters of spirit arts instead of magic」

—-

What Arthura said first, about the high possibility that both his parents were spirit art users, Rio had already understood.

「…….. On Latifa's body, there's already one system contract. Does that mean she can't practice spirit arts anymore? 」

That system contract was『Body Strengthening Magic(Hyper Physical Ability)』.

It was the only magic carved in Latifa body, so that she could work as an assassin.

「Umu, that is only the case for someone with several system contracts carved on his body. If it's only one, to remove it is not that difficult. The method itself looks like curse dispel. We already have plans to remove the system contract from that girl's body in the near future. After that, I will request for Oufia, the most prominent spirit art user in this village, to be her coach.」

Currently, Latifa was receiving lessons about country of Seirei no

tami from Oufia, Alma, and Sara.

Regarding that matter, Rio had arranged it without Latifa's consent, so that she could adapt quickly to the village of Seirei no tami.

Since Rio had to leave the village sooner or later.

That was the only request by Rio, so that Latifa would grow attached to living in the village before that time came.

friends, reason to stay. Thinking about it, since Sara, Oufia and Alma were around the same age as Latifa, they can become her best friends and be a reason for her to stay in the village.

「But, that, wouldn't it be better if Arthura-dono is the one to personally teach her? Since Latifa might be your great-granddaughter? 」

About the possibility that she was Arthura's great grandchild, Latifa has yet to know about that.

Arthura had said that she would tell Latifa herself when the time comes. Right now the priority was for Latifa to become accustomed to living in the village, so Rio delegated the previous matter to Arthura's judgement.

「Fufu, most likely, I can't be strict on that child. I know that she would also disagree, even now, I can feel that without hearing her say it. This was decided in a discussion with that child's grandparents」

Recalling the face of Latifa, Arthura let out a broad smile on her face.

「……. It seems that I caused you needless worries. My apologies」

Rio apologised to Arthura.

「There's no need for you to apologize. Despite being from different races, that child certainly feels that you're her brother.」

「Is that so……」

Though he had always cared for Latifaher nightmares, setting her free, making sure she's having a comfortable dayhe had also kept some things secret from her.

About the fact that he was, like Latifa, a reincarnated person.

Regarding that part, you could say that Rio was deceiving Latifa.

He, who couldn't tell her about that important matter, felt that he didn't have the qualification to be her brother.

But, he couldn't say that to Arthura.[3]

「By the way, I have one more question. Is it possible for a human who can use spirit art to form a system contract ceremony? 」

[TL : Previously, they talked about a magic user not being able to use spirit arts. On the other hand, can a spirit user use magic via performing a system contract ceremony.]

So that Rio could stop the current flow of the conversation, he asked another question to Arthura.

Though Arthura noticed the guilty emotion Rio held toward Latifa, she pretended to directly answer Rio's question with a bright smile on her face.

「About that, I think that as long as that person understood the usefulness of spirit arts, it should be possible」

Rio's body went stiff to the answer that was contrary to his theory.

If that was the case, there was no explanation about why his body never succeeded in system contract ceremony.

「On the other hand, it's different for someone who is bound in a contract with a spirit」

Arthura said that as an addition.

In other words, for someone who was already in contract with a spirit, when he tried to perform the system contract ceremony, in place of understanding the content of the contract a.k.a the magic

phenomenon –how the magic works– the magic carving to the body was rejected.

「…….. since I have never succeded in a system contract ceremony, could it be that I have a contract with a spirit？」

Though his body couldn't learn it, he couldn't think of it as anything but an exception to that rules.

「Hmmm, as I thought, did you have a contract with spirit？ But, it seems that you are not aware of it…」

「Yeah, I didn't realized it at all」

Rio shrugged his shoulders,remembering all his past troubles. .

「The contract spirit lives inside the body of the contractor, as if they are one …… 」

「That, I've never seen nor felt it.」

As expected, Rio's body really can't remember it.

「You've never seen nor felt it, huh. Most likely, it's still lying dormant inside Rio-dono's body …… 」

「So it's still dormant …… 」

—-

Even though there was an unknown being sleeping in his body, Rio was never conscious of it at all.

「Come to think of it, what are these so called spirits？」

Anyway, whether or not there was a spirit sleeping in his body, the fact was Rio didn't know what kind of existence a spirit is. So he asked a question regarding those so called spirits.

「Spirits are said to be MANA that had developed a self-conscious. In other words, a personality.」

「MANA that has their own personality…… Do they also have a shape? 」

He still couldn't imagine it with only that explanation.

「Many of them materialise by mimicking any shape of a being living in this world. Most of them are animals」

「Animals……. When I was attacked, that wolf that I saw , was it a spirit? 」

Rio recalled something like a wolf when his field of vision was snatched by a suddenly emitted light.

「Wolf spirit? Ah, maybe that was Sara's contracted spirit. That child has a contract with middle-leveled spirit. The others, like Oufia and Alma, are also contracted with middle-leveled spirits」

「A spirit, belonging to that girl. That was a spirit … 」

Though that thing had a strong inorganic feeling compared to the average beast, it couldn't be seen as anything other than one by someone not trained for it.

taking shape, thinking, releasing aura. Spirits generally took the shape of animals, just like that wolf, and gave out the same feeling as one. That was the conclusion that came to Rio.

「But, I can hardly see those girl's contracted spirits at normal times, why is that?」

「Ah, they usually stay inside the body of their contractor, changing their body into spirit. As for why the spirit stays inside the body of the contractor, it's because it's comfortable, since they are directly connected to the source of ODO」

「I see ……. then, there must be a way to make a contract with the spirits？」

「It would be according to the will of the spirits. If that side doesn't hold clear rejection toward the contract, that means the contract is complete」

「Then in that case, to bind a contract with several spirits? ……」

Rio imagined the figure of several spirits swarmed in one person.

「Hoho, though I couldn't say that there are no previous cases, they are actually quite rare. In the first place, the number of spirits that are willing to make a contract is small. To make a contract with a spirit, one must be loved very much by that spirit. And when someone has bind a contract with one spirit, the other spirits will refrain from doing one with him out of discretion.」

It looked like the case that he thought about was extremely rare.

「I see. Then, is there any benefit to binding a contract with a spirit? 」

「Fumu, the most prominent example of that is extremely smooth control when manipulating MANA, since the contracted spirit is deeply connected with the contractor. To be more accurate, the contracted spirit assists the controlling process of the spirit arts by reading the image in the contactors mind. The effect is tremendous even if you're contracted with a lesser spirit」

When he use spirit art for the first time in front of Arthura and the others, Rio recalled what Arthura said about him having a contract spirit.

That was because she saw him as extremely skillful with manipulation of MANA.

Although, whether the fact that he could use spirit arts was thanks to the blessing of the spirits, or because of his parents, or maybe both; there was still so many things that he didn't understand.

However, after this long time, he finally could get the answers to many of the question that were stuck in his head.

「Well, that was it for the basic knowledge, since you won't be able to handle more advanced knowledge if I didn't explain it beforehand. What's left now is practice. Rio-dono, when you treated your injury the other day, I believe that you were copying the magic used by humans using spirit art, is that right? 」

「That's right」

Arthura could see through it with only one look, the nature of Rio's spirit arts.

「Even so, to be able to cause such a phenomenon, I can only say that, by any standard, you can use the spirit arts to it's utmost perfection. The reason is that spirit arts requires more control compared to magic.」

Although magic had a narrow degree of freedom due to the system contract, it can be used without being able to perceive MANA; one only needed to master the perception of ODO.

Opposing that, spirit arts could only be used by mastering the control and perception of MANA, along with control and perception of ODO. It was tricky to use, but it allowed higher degree of freedom in controlling the effect of the arts.

That was what Arthura meant.

「Though there's a certain limit called the aptitude of the art user and quantity of ODO, depending on the user, spirit arts can be used more freely compared to magic. The most important point is being able to manipulate phenomenon by conveying the image to MANA」

「Conveying the image to MANA？」

「That's right. MANA reads the image conveyed by the art user from the user's ODO that merged with it. There's a faint ego in the MANA itself」

「Faint ego in the MANA …… 」

Spirits were aggregations of MANA who gained clear ego, if that was true then MANA was the first step for a spirit to come into being.

「This is what I mean by being able to convey the image to MANA at will. Look at this.」

Arthura pointed one of her fingers upright a little fireball was generated above her finger.

Humans, animals, and other objects, the fireball was transforming

into various shape at a dazzling speed.

「Though it doesn't mean that I can't use other attributes of spirit art, my[washi] magic is especially strong with flame arts. Usually, each person has a certain strong aptitude in spirit arts. It's impossible to make a general rule, since what I say is not absolute. There's also certain tendencies for each race, so it's recommended for you to explore yourself the spirit art that you excelled in.」

—-

「My own spirit arts ……that I excelled in」

「Uhm. Because invoking spirit arts with our weak attributes will bring less effect. In simple terms, be it Elves, dwarves, or beastman, each of the race have their own features and unique spirit arts. For example …….」

「Onii-chan！」

Incidentally when Arthura tried to continue her explanation, Latifa came running towards Rio.

「Kora, Latifa!」

Chasing after her from behind, long silver hair fluttering with the wind, was Sara, who came out wearing a red pleated skirt with tight black shirt.

「Hey, both of you. You're too fast!」

Following further from behind was Oufia, who was wearing a white one piece dress, and she arrived by flying. Her body was cladded by the wind, and her long golden hair danced gently within it.

At that suddenly bustling atmosphere, Rio's eyes opened wide in amazement.

「You will be able to do that once you master the spirit art」

Looking at Oufia, Arthura said those words with a prideful smile on her face.

「I see……」

The flying speed of Oufia was quite fast.

And then, the physical ability of Sara and Latifa were also high, to run at a speed that left the others behind.

Latifa was raising her physical ability with『Body Strengthening Magic(Hyper Physical Ability)』, while Sara strengthened her body and physical ability by using spirit arts, like Rio.

「Onii-chan！ The onee-chan's are kind and gentle but, they said that I couldn't meet onii-chan!」

Latifa said that to Rio as soon as she arrived.

「That's not what I mean. It was because Latifa couldn't remember the language of seirei no tami before!」

Sara explaining what Latifa just said.

「DON'T WANNA！ Humph, Sara onee-chan meanie!」

「Na~, Latifa . Seiza right here! Now, please take your seat properly!」

Though the image of Sara in Rio's mind was that of a diligent, serious adult, right now she was drawing closer to Latifa with a fierce-looking face.

「DON'T WANNA！」

Latifa stuck her tongue out toward Sara while one of her finger pulled her eyelid down.[14]

「Kuh, this kid ……..」

Sara's body made a small tremble.

「Y-you can't do that. Sara-chan. Latifa is still not accustomed yet to living in this village」

Immediately, Oufia soothed the angry Sara, that already had her tail and ears standing upright.

She seemed to have a gentle personality, from that calming feel.

「You're too soft, Oufia！ We have to be strict to this kid! Or else…」

[I understand that we need to discipline her, but Nee-sans are too loud. That makes you no different from Latifa.]

As if competing with Sara and Oufia, a noticeably little dwarf girl arrived to that place.

It was Alma.

With the bob cut of her blazing red hair covering a little portion her brown skin, she had an impressive look as a girl.

「Tha-that was, since Latifa snuck out ……」

「If it was Sara nee-san, you only needed to follow Latifa's smell, right？」[TL : Sara is wolf-eared-girl, just reminder]

Alma rejected Sara with her logical thinking, though Sara tried giving a feeble objection it was brutally destroyed by Alma's preaching.

Alma was wearing short red trousers and a white tunic with red patterns. Though she had boyish appearance, she had a very calm and intellectual personality.

「Uuu……」

Sara, that was left with no room for objection, was lost for words.

She looked for help from Oufia. Unaware of them, Latifa was already seeking refuge in the place with Arthura and Rio.

（O, Oufia~）

「Is that really alright? To begin with, even if it's just a by a little Sara nee-san is the oldest one amongst us, therefore …… 」

Sara, that was receiving a sermon from Alma, who was younger than her, for little more than 10 minutes, turned her sight towards Oufia, who was shrewdly running away.

Notes

1. MANA and odo here written in katakana, usually MANA written in kanji

2. did I just read an explanation for Rio to become a super saiya?

3. he can't tell her that he didn't have qualification to be called as her Onii-chan

4. あっかんべー → Bweee!!!BWEEEEEE!!!!

Chapter 24

Mock Battle

Half a year had passed since he came to the village of Seirei no tami. Rio was currently having his spirit art training in the plaza at the outskirt of the village like usual.

「I've already taught all I can teach to you regarding spirit art. There's nothing left for me to teach.」

Arthura muttered in admiration at the figure of Rio perfectly executing spirit arts before her.

「This is also due to Arthura-dono's help」

With a light smile, Rio said his gratitude to Arthura for coaching him on spirit art.

「Even so, in less than one year, to reach the point of freely using spirit art at will, it must be due to Rio-dono's overwhelming talent. I only gave a little advice. You also become versed in many types of spirit art. My, my, the spirits really showered their affection on you. 」

Receiving the gratitude from Rio, Arthura smiled at him.

According to Arthura, Rio's aptitude matched all spirit arts.

He could manipulate every natural phenomenon such as fire, water, ice, earth, wind, and thunder. In addition, he can also cause various phenomenon.[1]

Arthura could manipulate those phenomena too.

However, it was impossible for her to freely manipulate each of them to similar degree.

They could not come close to the fire element spirit art and

witchcraft[genjutsu][2], her strongest arts.

「The remaining subject related to spirit arts is Rio-dono's unidentified contract spirit.」

Arthura was referring to the contract spirit in Rio, which remained unidentified till now.

「Is there no way to know about the contracted spirit？」

Adhering to Arthura's direction, Rio had left that topic alone until now.

「Uhm, someone who knows… the spirit sleeping inside you. I am not sure. Maybe there's one person, but……..」

Arthura spoke in an unclear manner.

「Is there some problem？　」

「Uhm. Well, just a little actually」

Rio tilted his head, not quite understanding what "Just a little" meant.

「It's a person that lives in Seirei no tami, right? 」

「Nay, this person is actually a spirit itself. Moreover it's an exceedingly high ranking existence.　In other words, a Quasi High Ranking Spirit[3]. It's the spirit of the great tree, Dryad-sama」

「Spirit of the great tree, could it be……」

Rio looked towards the majestic figure of the gigantic tree, that towered over it's surroundings.

「Uhm, the living place of Dryad-sama is at that great tree in the center of this forest」

Arthura arbitarily answered Rio.

But, there was one thing that Rio couldn't understand.

「Can't the other spirits see through the true form of the unknown spirit inside me？　　」

Rio considered since all of them were spirits, there was no need to go as far as asking the Dryad.

「It's a matter of fact that spirits can perceive the existence of other spirits. But, ordinary spirits can't speak in words despite having intelligence. They act by reading their contract partners' intention, and can point something out to them, in ambiguous way; but they aren't able to talk about something clearly with the partners. Only top class spirits can perfectly convey their thoughts to people」

Rio nodded his head on hearing those words.

「I see …….. Can I go to the great tree? 」

「That's the problem. That place is something akin to a sacred place for seirei no tami. With the exception of the spirit festival that is held once a year, even seirei no tami can't just boldly enter that place. An approval is necessary for entering it other than that time」

Rio's intentions were already grasped by her with those words.

「In other words, they didn't know whether to let I, who is an outsider, enter it or not? 」

Rio guessed rightly to Arthura's worry.

「Uhm, for our benefactor Rio-dono, it should be ……. it's just like what you said. I'm sorry Rio-dono, since there's still members of the elder council that don't trust Rio-dono yet, even now」

Arthura slightly frown and said that with an apologetic face.

The news about a human boy staying in the village −as benefactor of a girl of the seirei no tami− had already spread throughout the village. But, with the exception of a few seirei no tami, Rio's had lived far from contact with others.

It was already a fact that the seirei no tami didn't have a good image for the human race, that's why even the elder council of this village… no, it's because they were the elders that they stubbornly remained wary of Rio.

The elder council's approval was necessary to go to the great tree,

that was why it was necessary to gain their trust.

「I will try to arrange it, so that you can somehow enter the great tree. Till that time, please wait patiently. Well, besides that, there should be a great number of things that Rio-dono needs to know. That fellow, Dominique, seems eager to teach his dwarf knowledge to Rio-dono. You will also be able to take pleasure in having Syldra as your personal tutor about elves.」

To wipe away the anxiety from the current situation, Arthura spoke cheerfully about Rio's good fortune.

Rio could ask for lessons directly from the elders of the seirei no tami.

Besides the problems between races, some people may also took offence with teaching Rio knowledge of seirei no tami. However, Rio dismissed his concern on it and took it as a good opportunity.

「I think it's good to finish here for today. Shall we go look at how Latifa's doing right now? 」

Arthura let out a bright smile once she recalled her cute great-grandchild.

「Hehh. I also want to see how she has grown」

Rio accepted Arthura's proposal, together they went to the plaza that was used for Latifa's spirit art training.

In that place were five people: Latifa, Oufia, Sara, Alma, and Uzuma.

「Thi-this, greetings Arthura-dono, Rio-dono……」

Though Uzuma was the first one in those five who noticed Rio and Arthura, she gave her greeting while lowering her head, as if being ashamed by something.

「Uhm」

「Hello. Uzuma-dono」

Rio awkwardly returned her greeting in the seirei no tami language[4] after seeing her like that.

Uzuma became surprised at how well Rio was in using the Seirei no tami language.

「Could it be, you can already speak in the seirei no tami language？」

She asked with eyes full of curiousity.

「Yes, thanks to the lessons that I received constantly from Arthura-dono, now I can handle it if it's a daily life conversation. But it's still a way to go, as I still feel awkward when using it」

—-

Rio continued his study of their language with hands on training by spending most of his everyday life conversing using the seirei no tami language.

Thanks to that, his proficiency in the seirei no tami language reached a level where it wouldn't be a problem for him to converse with it in his daily life.

「Even so, that was still an incredible learning speed……」

Alma whose beside her voiced her admiration.

The others in the group also sent him their admiring gazes, it made Rio felt itchy.

「Thank you very much.」

After he shyly gave his short gratitude, Rio turned towards Latifa, who was eagerly waiting for him to finish his conversation.

「Latifa, are you studying properly? 」

「Un! I got better in using spirit arts! We had a Mock Combat just now. Uzuma-san's really strong! Next, I will fight against Sara-oneechan」

Latifa clung to Rio as she was talking.

After burying her face into Rio body, she then looked up at Rio.

「Is that so? Then, can Arthura-dono and I watch Latifa's Mock Combat? 」

「Um~, Okay! Sara-oneechan! Come on let's fight!」

Latifa dashed towards the center of the plaza in high spirits, wanting to show off her skills to Rio.

「Geez, that child is really… She get into high spirits just because Rio-sama came」

Sara chased Latifa's back, expressing her feelings that it couldn't be helped.

After those two arrived at the center of the plaza, Oufia signalled the start.

Strengthening their bodies and physical ability at the moment of the signal, those two started to move in an instant.

Since Latifa had also already learnt spirit arts, the physical and body strengthening magic she was using was also from spirit arts.

（So fast）

Rio was surprised by that speed.

Latifa's speed increased by leaps and bounds when compared to when she first met Rio.

The only grace of『Body Strengthening Magic (Hyper Physical Ability)』was strengthening physical ability; it was different from spirit arts reinforcement, which also strengthened the user's body and not just physical ability.

But, it was the same for Sara, who was also strengthening her body and physical ability with spirit arts.

By Rio's observation, their speeds were almost equal.

If that was the case, then it was left to their skill.

In that regard, right now they were testing the water by executing feint attacks.

Both of them were using wooden knives as weapons.

Rio stood next to Uzuma and silently watched their match.

However, a little while later, he noticed that Uzuma was struggling to calm herself.

Though quite a long time had already passed since he came to the village of the seirei no tami, Uzuma still had that attitude, as if she was avoiding Rio.

Although no hostility could be felt from her, it still felt awkward for him.

「I don't mind about that matter anymore. Uzuma-dono, you don't have to worry about it.」

Thinking that their relationship had been stiff all this while, Rio resolved himself and said it out.

Uzuma reacted with a surprise look at Rio.

「Eh? Was I mistaken?」

Rio had thought that maybe Uzuma was still regretting her misunderstanding, which caused her to gravely injure Rio.

But, from Uzuma's reaction, it looked like it was due to completely different matter, that she was acting like that towards Rio.

If that was the case, then what was the cause of her behaviour? When Rio worried how he must converse with her, Uzuma began to speak first.

「……No, you're not wrong. Part of the reason is also that it's just that Rio-dono is completely different from the image of the human race that I had, and… I am also troubled on how to face you. I'm really sorry. All of this happened due to my lack of manners.」

It turned out that her awkward manner toward Rio was related to the problems between races.

Maybe her feelings of gratitude toward Rio for saving a girl of her brethren clashed with her guilt for severely wounding Rio from the misunderstanding. Then there was her unease towards Rio due to racial issues, all of that jumbled together in Uzuma's mind.

Because of deep historical origin, her prejudice towards his race was hard to remove with just his one or two small actions.

「I understand that it's not easy to change that bad image about humans. I will not try to change that. Instead, I would be grateful if you could just be yourself around me. You'd feel worn out, right, if you continued to try and force yourself? 」

He shrugged his shoulders when saying that, while letting out an awkward smile.

「……I wish to express my deepest gratitude for Rio-dono's consideration toward me」

Uzuma lowered her head towards Rio with a movement that made her look like a natural born military man.

Arthura, Oufia, and Alma looked at those two from the side with great curiousity.

On the other hand, while those two were in the middle of their conversation, Sara and Latifa's match was almost at its climax.

Latifa gave her best shot but, Sara was still way above her.

Rio also thought that Sara herself was a truly talented fighter, despite there also being an age difference, her combat ability surpassed Latifa who was trained as an assassin.

Though maybe Latifa could stand on the same ground as Sara when she grew up, as she continued her training. Most likely she would be chasing after Sara's back, who is her senior, for a while.

「U~~u, I was also defeated by Sara-oneechan」

Latifa said that while looking down with a frustated look on her face.

「That's only natural since I'm older. Since I have continuously learnt

the basics for a long time from the soldiers of the seirei no tami. With Latifa's age, this is already good enough for you to become a soldier of the seirei no tami」

Sara coaxed the bitter Latifa, who was slumping on the ground.

「Yeah, you really are strong. I can't do anything at all」

Oufia also tried to coax Latifa.

「That was because Oufia-neesan is a rearguard and spirit art user type; it's only natural that you can't win against a vanguard type like Sara-neesan or Uzuma-san in close combat 」

And here, Alma added her tsukkomi.

Maybe due to her honest personality, or was her own trait that she speaks what she thinks.

「But, Onii-chan is still waaay stronger than Sara-oneechan and Uzuma-san ! 」

Latifa said that with complete belief for Rio's victory.

「Mu, my pride as a warrior won't just let that line be, but……」

—-

Uzuma's pride as the warrior chief got ignited by the [of course he is] in Latifa's tone.

「I couldn't do anything against onii-chan at all ! Uzuma-san is waaay more powerful than me but, you still have yet to defeat onii-chan! 」

「Latifa, Uzuma is the strongest young warrior in this village. Even if he excels in spirit arts, for Rio-sama, a child of the human, to win against her is just…… 」

Sara, who was very familiar with Uzuma's strength, said a different opinion to Latifa.

「Then, we will find that out with combat. Right, Onii-chan? 」

Latifa looked at Rio with upturned eyes [5], fully believing in Rio's

power from the bottom of her heart.

He really wanted to reject her request, seeing that it was turning in a really troublesome direction but, Rio wasn't inconsiderate enough to betray the innocent expectations of Latifa.

「Want to try it？」

While smiling bitterly in his heart, Rio proposed a Mock Combat challenge to Uzuma.

「Yeah, certainly」

Uzuma replied instantly.

It was as if she was really eager to do that.

After choosing their weapons for the Mock Combat, those two took their places at the center of the plaza.

The rule was the same as before, only physical and body strengthening spirit arts were permissible in the match.

Uzuma, with her wooden spear, versus Rio, with his wooden sword.

「BEGIN！」

Uzuma dashed toward Rio, right at the start of the match.

Her speed, with the added driving force of her wings, was basically like an arrow fired toward Rio.

Despite her calm face, her spirit was ablaze.

Maybe it was due to her extreme confidence in her own strength.

Rio was smiling lightly at Uzuma's straightforward manner.[161]

Uzuma instantly shortened the distance to Rio and stabbed her spear at Rio; naturally her body and physical ability were strengthened with magical power. [TN : magical power here using 魔力[maryoku] not the MANA from before]

Rio warded the disorderly thrust from Uzuma, which come at him like an avalanche.

Uzuma showed an astonished face at Rio, who parried her attack easily without any wasted movement.

Uzuma distanced herself from Rio for an instant and then lunged at him from a low stance, almost like crawling on the ground. She struck at his chest with her spear from below, like the fish jumping against the rapids.

Though Rio stopped the blow that came from the front, Uzuma exerted more force into the strike.

Rio's body lightly floated from the impact.

With the her heels stomping hard and wings flapping powerfully, Uzuma sent Rio flying with her charge.

The distance between them opened for a brief moment.

Uzuma leapt toward Rio, who was thrown in the air, as if to not let him escape, and then accurately sent four thrusts, aiming at Rio limbs.

Rio parried her spear with his sword and evaded her attacks by twisting his body and shifting his limbs.

Then, using the recoil, he sent a horizontal slash towards Uzuma's body.

Uzuma instantly dodged his counter by flapping her wings to drive herself backwards.

Matching her in a aerial battle was really difficult.[7]

Both of them landed on the ground while keeping their distance.

It lasted but an instant. In one single step, Rio suddenly shrunk their distance.[8]

「!!! 」

The offensive was reversed. Rio's figure disappeared from Uzuma in that split second.

However, due to her natural instincts, she barely managed to block

Rio’s attack, which also destroyed her stance.

Uzuma tried to separate from Rio and fix her stance.

However, without letting the chance go, Rio rushed at her. He erased the space that was needed for her to manipulate her spear; his sharp thrusts came one after another towards the gaps in her defence.

「KUH!!」

Now it was Uzuma’s turn to find herself in a disadvantage situation.

Though she could still barely defend herself from Rio’s attack, Rio was already superior from the number of attacks.

If it was using real weapons, Uzuma’s body would already be full of small cuts.

In that constant barrage, Uzuma made a slip and Rio unleashed a powerful blow at that opportunity with a large swing of his sword.

Uzuma stopped the blow which sent her body flying backwards a little.

Uzuma warded the impact of that attack by flapping her wings, then slowly descended to the ground.

「……With this match, I recognize you as a warrior. Looks like I need to fight you at my full power」

Uzuma said that with a different tone than she normally used.

At the same time, Uzuma’s stance changed.

[Biku], a chill ran through Rio’s body.

Then, she instantly closed their gap and threw a fierce stab, aimed at Rio’s body.

Rio immediately side-stepped to escape, as he could not block that crushing pressure.

A prickling sensation suddenly felt his neck he turned his neck

sideways.

In the next moment, there was the sound of something passing through the air; it was Uzuma's kick, which was aimed at where Rio's head was, just a moment ago.

「Hoou, Good. You managed to dodge that.　But, how about this!」

She blasted a heavy strike at Rio , along with those words.

But, Rio had stopped that blow.

His expression distorted as he received it, the one-handed sword he used was gripped with his both hands; Uzuma pressed at him with a nonchalant expression.

Rio retreated backwards a great distance from the clash to ward the power in that strike.

「Isn't this already a little surpassing the level of a Mock Combat?」

Rio said that with a wry smile.

「Of course! There's no reason for me to hold back my joy against this kind of strong opponent!」

Uzuma exclaimed that loudly while letting out a ferocious smile.

Rio thought that it couldn't be helped, since she was a little bit of a Battle Junkie. [191]

Rio could only smile lightly.

He couldn't rebutt her since somehow or another he was also similar to her.

Rio felt a little delighted. It had been a long time since he found an opponent on which he could go all out.

It was a good idea to spare his thoughts and go wild like this, once a while.

But, Uzuma greatly surpassed him with her current physical ability.

At this rate it would be a thin line separating winner and loser.

（Then, let’s get ourselves equal）

Thereupon, the ODO overflowing from Rio’s body rised, it also flowed with great density.

「Mu, what’s with that kind of ODO density」

Uzuma opened her eyes wide at the armor of ODO that was enveloping Rio’s body. [TL : 555-Henshin!!!]

He was strengthening his body and physical ability with spirit arts, and rose it to the next level with a quantity of ODO clad his body like armor.

Even if his base strength fell behind Uzuma, who was a beastman, he just needed to strengthen his body and physical ability with his ODO till he surpassed her.

That kind of realization had just come to Rio. [TL : cough*Kamen*cough*Rider*cough]

But, just realising it was not enough.

Whether or not his body could cope with that massive quantity of ODO all at once was another story.

It was necessary for him to control the massive amount of ODO and find a suitable amount for him to be clad in.

—-

「Could it be that, till now, you did not went all out?」

Uzuma said that while smiling lightly.

「Nope, I was going all out. Maybe it’s embarrassing for me to say it, but, I have never had a chance to strengthen myself to this level 」

「I see. Though it doesn’t seem that you’re using all your power yet」

Uzuma wielded her spear, and suddenly appeared in front of Rio.

「Not at all, I’m almost hitting my upper limit, you know」

Rio said that while stopping Uzuma’s direct frontal blow, just like

that .

「And you say that with nonchalant expression！　HAAAA！」

Then she send wild thrusts with random tempo to Rio.

Rio evaded those attacks, each one after the other, with minimum movement like flowing water. Then, matching the with flow of her breath, he closed in to Uzuma's bosom as she was thrusting her spear and swung his sword at the exposed chest.

「KUH!!」

When she stopped Rio's attack with emergency posture, rotating her spear using the part that was hit by Rio's sword as its center, she use Rio's own power to launch a sweeping strike at his face.

Rio dodged that attack by turning his head sideways.

Immediately followed by countless of their attacks countering each other.

If those had been metal weapons, spark would have flown in every direction along with the clanking sound of weapons.

A series of heavy blows rained upon Rio.

However, Rio warded all of those attacks without moving even a single step.

「AMAZING！ No matter how I hit, none of it is getting through!」
Uzuma said that with a delighted face.

With resolution to put her life on the line, Uzuma then launched a surprise attack, a daring spear uppercut as she sprung at Rio, just to force Rio to inch from his spot.

Rio avoided that attack by side-stepping for a half step, and launched a counter.

「KUH」

Rio's wooden sword finally struck Uzuma's body.

Though he stopped his blow just before it landed, Uzuma's expression was vexed, as she knew that she had been completely unable to protect herself from that blow.

「……It's my loss. Thank you very much. It was already beyond a little excessive」

Uzuma instantly returned to her usual calm and composed self, and politely bowed to Rio.

Rio noticed that there was a tinge of red on her face.

(Maybe she was embarrassed by her previous fighting spirit)

「Don't worry, it was the same for me. I also enjoyed it. If you don't mind it, please have a match with me again」

「Yeah, with pleasure」

Uzuma chimed her approval at Rio's proposal with a happy expression. [10]

Her awkward demeanour from before had completely vanished.

Somehow they managed to grasp each others character during their short match.

Sara, Oufia, Alma, and Arthura were still dumfounded with their jaws wide open, even after those two had finished their match. [11]

「Ne, let's just say！ Onii-chan is powerful, right!」

Amongst them, only Latifa puffed up her plains-like chest with a triumphant face, as if saying [That's only natural right!?].

Notes

1. manipulating is different from causing
2. Genjutsu here can also translated as magic, but I choose to use witchcraft since magic here using Madou not genjutsu

3. 準高位精霊(Quasi High Rank Spirit)–> any better idea?

4. it sound like japanese to me

5. Pleading eyes

6. the raw indicated single minded Uzuma, but let it be straight forward instead, since they're having a match not a test

7. SHE IS A BIRD!!! Once again, SHE IS A BIRD. It's only natural for her to FLY

8. Shundo[instant movement]

9. Junkie is heavy user, someone who can't live without it or something similiar to it; like an alcohol junkie (alcoholic) or drug junkie, or food junkie (made me remember of Bambino)

10. is this a flag again

11. modified the sentence a bit for a bit of fun to connect with Uzuma's words that comes after.

Chapter 25

Cooking Class

The Seirei no Tami village was one of many groups belonging to a country consisting of therianthropes[1], dwarves, and elves.

The human race ruthlessly expanded their influence by taking advantage of the Demon-God war which occurred over 1000 years ago. Lamenting over the conflict against the human race, the Seirei no Tami withdrew deep into the primeval forest and severed all contact with the outside world. There they spent an endless 1000 years in isolation cultivating their own culture and development.

Though the population of the Seirei no Tami could not be compared to that of the human race, in agriculture, industrial might, medicine, and architecture, they greatly surpassed the human race in every field of expertise.

The area which contributed the most in spearheading such advancements were the spirit arts.

As such, their accumulation of knowledge brought about longer life expectancies when compared to the human race.

Though Rio was amazed by the framework of their magic tools and arms craftsmanship, he received the greatest shock from their food and bath culture.

In the first place, the Seirei no Tami obsessed over cleanliness. Because they were able to freely produce hot water, a Japanese-style bathhouse was constructed.

Rio, who was enduring with a bathtub (bucket) up until now, was moved to tears and made full use of the bathhouse everyday.

In addition, the Seirei no Tami village was like a treasure trove of

cooking ingredients for Rio.

With an enormous selection of ingredients, and by managing the soil with spirit arts, all the crops harvested were of exceptional quality.

Not to mention the crops could not be planted in the human race region. Even if they were to compare identical crops, the quality of the ones grown in the human region paled in comparison.

There existed many dishes unique to the Seirei no Tami. Yet, while requesting teachings from the elders, Rio continued to rack his brain attempting to reproduce a great numbers of dishes from his previous life regardless of their culture[21].

Initially Rio resided in a guestroom belonging to the governing body of the Serei no Tami. However Rio accepted the offer to move into Arthura's house together with Latifa after deciding to properly settle in the village.

Due to a petition by Latifa, who was accustomed to Rio's cooking, and the generosity of Arthura's family, it was decided that Rio would be in charge of the cooking.

Alma, Sara, and Oufia became frequent guests after being invited over for dinner once by Latifa and were captivated by Rio's cooking.

Rio began offering his cooking as gifts and the number of people who became aware of his cooking increased. News of the mysterious recipes unknown to even the Serei no Tami started to spread like wildfire.

Before long, the majority of the Seirei no Tami, including those who previously avoided contact with Rio, caught wind of Rio's dishes.

Rio saw it as an excellent chance for Latifa to become acquainted with people from the village and to allow her to enjoy the dishes of his past life even after he left the village. Pestered by Latifa, he proposed to Arthura to regularly hold cooking classes.

Thereafter, on the condition that it was to be limited to only the elder council member's families, he was permitted to conduct the experimental cooking classes. [TL : That old fox……]

On the day the first cooking class was to be held, many Seirei no Tami women gathered at the huge kitchen commonly reserved for festivals.

They were the women belonging to the upper-echelons of the Seirei no Tami village.

「Rice is an ingredient that can be served in a variety of ways. As most of you already know, short grain is suitable for steaming and cooking while long grain is better suited for boiling. However, this distinction does not always hold true.」[3]

Due to discovering rice in the Seirei no Tami village, Rio decided to start with rice dishes for his first cooking class.

Rio stood in the kitchen surrounded by Seirei no Tami women. Among them, he could make out the figures of Latifa, Sara, Alma, and Oufia.

「There exist rice dishes where the choice between short and long grain doesn't matter. Now, I'm going to explain how this dish is created. Depending on the seasonings and ingredients you're using, you must fine tune how you cook your rice accordingly.」

To the women, Rio explained the cooking method in the the Seirei no Tami language.

「Thus, with that in mind, I intend to make a dish called omelette rice today. You can use whichever type of rice you prefer, whether it's short or long grain. The minimum required ingredients needed for this dish are onions[tamanegi], salt, pepper, and a homemade seasoning called tomato ketchup. Also, butter is necessary to further enhance its taste. Afterwards you can also add other toppings such as green peas, ham, mushrooms, and so on to your liking.」

The ingredients needed to make the omelette rice were already arranged on the kitchen table.

「Then, let's start cooking at once. The typical way is to first, prepare a rice called butter rice.」

Rio taught them how to prepare the butter rice.

Since the Seirei no Tami also knew how to add flavour to white rice, they did not seem surprised in that regard.

「Frying the butter rice with tomato ketchup will create chicken rice that will become the base for omelette rice. But, butter rice can also be turned into a different dish, called pilaf, by cooking it with different seasonings. You can enjoy this pilaf rice with different sauces and gravy added on top. I will save that dish for a future class.」

The women raised minute voices of admiration at the variety of uses for the butter rice.

Perhaps it was some kind of instinct for women, but they would not mind going the extra mile if it meant being able to prepare various dishes for their husbands and children.

「While waiting for the butter rice to be cooked, we will prepare tomato ketchup. The ingredients that we'll need are tomatoes, onions[tamanegi], garlic, sugar, salt, pepper, bay leaf, cayenne peppers, consomme, and cinnamon.」

Glancing at the required ingredients arranged on the table, he skillfully began preparing tomato ketchup while explaining the required amounts and procedure.

「Tomato ketchup is very flexible as it can be used in a variety of dishes. Because it can be preserved for a long time, it's convenient to prepare some beforehand and store it.」

While waiting for the butter rice to finish cooking, Rio answered questions from the gathered women.

「The butter rice is about to be finished cooking. We will begin preparing an omelette by battering and frying an egg. The omelette rice will be completed after wrapping the chicken rice in the omelette. Speaking of which, the chicken rice can also be served by itself as its own dish.」

Rio skillfully used the frying pan and spatula to cook the chicken rice and subsequently made a soft-cooked omelette. The omelette rice was completed by skillfully wrapping the chicken rice in the soft-cooked omelette.

「This is what's generally called omurice[14]. Furthermore, various sauces can be added to create different arrangements. Well then, everyone please sample the dish.」

Due to the aroma being released during the cooking process, the women's appetites were stimulated to the point that they were staring at the dish [and Rio] like a pack of hungry wolves[15].

When Rio gave the signal to begin sampling, despite their proper manners, the women's spoons fiercely competed against one another to obtain a larger helping of the omelette rice[16].

The moment the soft-cooked omelette, which served as a cover, was torn, a mouthwatering aroma permeated the entire room.

The plate was emptied in a flash. Although[17] it was a larger serving than normal, Rio had made just enough so that none of it would be wasted.

Maybe each one of them got a bite.

All of the women alternated looks between their spoons and the now-empty plate as if they were regretting something.

「Is it to your liking?」

Rio asked the women with a FULL-BRIMMED SMILE after witnessing their gusto.[18]

The women slightly blushed when they realized Rio was teasing them.

「I have taught you how to make proper omelette rice today, however you can also use cold rice in the event where you are pressed for time or only have cold rice. Do note that it will have an inferior taste compared to using butter rice. Omelette rice can also be prepared by just wrapping white rice mixed with tomato ketchup in a soft-cooked omelette. Well then, let's have everyone try making one themselves.」

The women seperated into predetermined groups and started cooking.

The group of girls from the same generation consisting of Alma, Oufia, Sara, and Latifa, also challenged themselves to make the omelette rice.

As the women were cooking, Rio answered questions that arose when they were unclear about parts of the procedure.

「It seems several groups have successfully finished preparing the omelette rice. Those who've finished can go ahead and help yourselves to your dishes. Also, as today's lesson has concluded, please clean up your areas and store any kitchenware you've used back to their appropriate locations after you've finished eating. Thank you for your hard work.」

—-

After confirming all the groups had already finished cooking their omelette rice, Rio left the kitchen-cum-classroom.

Only to be greeted by Latifa and the group of girls.

「Is it really alright? Won't I only make everyone feel rest—……. 」

For some reason everyone wanted to eat their omelette rice together with him. Rio, who was surrounded by dozens of girls from different tribes, pointed out that being near him would only give rise to discomfort for them.

Because he was of the human race.

Don't they have the least bit of fear [because I'm a human]? Rio harboured these kinds of worries.

「Don't say something like that. Latifa put her heart into cooking this for you. Isn't it only right for onii-chan[9] to eat the handmade dish made by his imouto[10]?」

A pair of older catgirls intervened when they saw him troubled by the current situation.

Their ages were around 16~17 years old.

「Beside, it's been almost a year since Rio-dono started living in the

village right? Yet it's rare for you to interact with others in the village. We've also felt uneasy all this time you know.」

「How much information about myself has already spread to everyone?」

「We've heard various things about you from Oufia-sama, Alma-sama, Sara-sama, and Latifa. You're polite, smart too since you've already memorized the Seirei no Tami language, and to top it off, also quite good-looking. Your martial arts talent is on par with Uzuma-ane [11] , a brilliant spirit art user who has surpassed even Oufia-sama, binding into a contract with a mysterious spirit. Moreover, an exceptional cook! There's no way we won't recognize you.」 [TL : Is it just me or those girls are talking about some kind of perfect man. They only need to add that he is a certain kingdom's crown prince, then he will become perfect husband candidate] [ED2: It'd be nice if she could learn how to use periods…]

「A—Anya-san ! 」

The chattering canaries (Sara & co.) raised surprised voices in hurry.

Since the image they held of Rio was revealed, it was only natural that they were flustered.

「I'm happy to hear that, even if it's just flattery.」

Rio was being humble in order to ward off the words from the girl called Anya.

「It's not flattery. I heard the human race mature quickly due to their shorter lifespan but, you're too humble. Anyone who saw you in the cooking class today would've given you a high evaluation. No one's narrow-minded enough to lower their evaluation of you just because you're a human. Isn't that right everyone? 」

Ignoring Sara & Co's worried eyes, Anya instantly dropped a bombshell and the surrounding women nodded twice, as if giving their approval.

「That's right, nanodesu! This dish is delicious! 」

A wolf girl part of the same generation as Latifa proclaimed such as she gleefully devoured the omelette rice.

「Ehehe, even Bella-chan said that onii-chan's cooking is delicious.」

「YEAH！ As expected of Latifa's onii-sama nanodesu!」

It seemed she was really intimate with Latifa.

Rio let out a wry smile seeing how close they were. [ED: There he goes again, smiling in a way other than bitterly.][TL : he always like that, at least put a proper smile]

「Thank you. Please also take care of Latifa.」

「FUFU, of course I will！」

Bella nodded with a beaming smile while eating her omelette rice.

「Hey Bella, you can't talk while eating, you know 」

Sara gently scolded Bella with her ane-san face.

「Wafu~, I'm sorry Sara-oneesama…」

「Ara~ara~, Bella-chan」

Bella had become despondent, like a little puppy.

Oufia soothed her.

The other girls could not help but smile when they saw them.

「Nevertheless, how did Rio-oniisama bind a contract with a spirit-sama? 」

Bella asked Rio with a look full of respect and curiosity.

(Ni—nii-sama?)

Though he was perplexed at being called such title, he didn't hate it.

Somehow, the girl called Bella was quite sociable.

「Actually, I don't know myself. For some reason it seems to be lying dormant, sleeping inside my body in its spirit form.」

Rio said that with troubled face.

「He~~. I wonder what kind of spirit it is. I'm slightly envious since it's our greatest aspiration to bind a contract with a spirit.」

Anya said that with a wide smile and continued eating her omelette rice.

As she said, the greatest honour for the Seirei no Tami's was to bind a contract with a spirit.

For that reason, people who bound a contract with a spirit received greater respect than others. Rio was no exception even if he was a human.

Approval for the cooking classes was also granted thanks to the members of the elder council learning about Rio's spirit contract from Arthura.

「Well, I've wanted to talk to you about various things. Since this is a rare opportunity, I'm going to ask you lots of questions!」

With those words acting as a cue, various questions were thrown at him by the girls. Rio held casual conversations with the girls and took the opportunity to deepen his friendship with them. The atmosphere around them was lively from the start until end.

Notes

1. Beastmen
2. Chinese, French, Japanese, Italian, etc.
3. please search for short grain and long grain] [ED: In my neck of the world that's a thing. *shrug* Might be different elsewhere.][TL : Oh well, they're variety of rice
4. Abbreviation of omelette rice
5. spicing the sentence a bit] [ED2: *Rolls eyes*
6. did he become Satou, the miracle chef, now?

7. A complex but beautiful grammar of Japanese. Means “Although …., still…”. In short, you can use despite, even though etc. The main thing here is to contrast the two main things mentioned. In this case, it is “large portion” and “just enough for everyone”.

8. he usually smiling bitterly] [ED: He bitter smiles at least twice in most chapters] [ED2: He’s just a bitter person, and rightfully so too

9. Older brother

10. Little sister

11. Older sister

Chapter 26

Spirit of The Great Tree

Part 1

「Permission to go to the Great Tree has been granted?」

On a day some time after Rio held the first cooking class, he was notified by Arthura that permission to approach the Great Tree had been granted.

「Uhm it seems that the cooking class started by Rio-dono was very well received and your reputation jumped quite a bit. In addition to that, when I was explaining the reason why you wanted to go to the Great Tree, I told them you were contracted to an unidentified spirit. Because our faith is centered around spirits, we respect all who are able to contract spirits.」

Arthura told Rio the details about how she managed to obtain permission.

「I see.」

Hearing the story, Rio let a bitter smile creep onto his face.

Although the level of distrust against Rio was not alarming, it had been greatly abated recently.

While Rio only started the cooking class for Latifa's sake, he found it rather amusing that various benefits for him also emerged as a result.

「Then, we can go to the Great Tree during the next Spirit Festival?」

Based on what he knew, the next Spirit Festival was scheduled to be held in two weeks.

「No, I've arranged it so that we'll go before the Spirit Festival. Otherwise you may be unable to keep calm with so many people watching.」

Almost the entirety of the Seirei no Tami population would gather around the Great Tree during the Spirit Festival.

Arthura was being considerate for Rio since it was not an issue that should be discussed in public.

「That's… I'm truly grateful for your consideration.」

Rio thanked Arthura's consideration with a smile.

「Hoho, a youngster like you wouldn't be able to keep calm in front of such a massive amount of people. Besides, I also regard Rio-dono as my benefactor. This much is just a simple matter, you know.」

Arthura floated a gentle smile while talking.

「That's why, aside from me, there will only be four people tagging along: Oufia, Sara, Alma, and Uzuma. The condition for permitting you access is that we're to accompany you as guides, so I hope you don't mind.」[11]

「Sure. I don't mind.」

As for Rio, he did not mind the condition so he immediately replied.

「Umu, then departure is in 3 days. It's not far so it'll only take us 30 minutes to get there.」

And so, 3 days later, guided by Arthura and the others, Rio proceeded to the Great Tree where the Quasi High Spirit, Dryad, resided.

By the way, Latifa also tagged along with them in order to meet the spirit for the first time. [ED: Seems like the custom for Seirei no Tami to greet the Dryad] [TL : well, Latifa is a lost child of seirei no tami, so Dryad actually didn't know about her birth, maybe just a pre-caution]

Though he saw the Great Tree on a daily basis during his time in the

village, Rio became overwhelmed by its presence as he got closer.

「I'm not sure how to describe this, but, while the surrounding trees are also really big, none of them emit a divine and majestic presence comparable to the Great Tree.」

Mesmerized by the Great Tree when he witnessed it, Rio voiced his impressions.

「Ara, I'm so glad that you say that.」

The charming voice of a woman was heard.

Arthura, Uzuma, Sara, Oufia, and Alma immediately knelt the moment the voice was heard.

Rio and Latifa also followed suit.

「It's a pleasure to meet you. I am Dryad, the spirit residing in the Great Tree.」

Introducing herself with an innocent smile, a young woman appeared before Rio wearing a one-piece dress adorned with beautiful flowers.

Possessing wavy, long green hair that reached the ground and emerald coloured irides, she gave off the impression of an ephemeral beauty, yet was wrapped in a gentle atmosphere.

「Excuse my rudeness for the late introduction. I am Rio.」

At Dryad's sudden appearance, the bewildered Rio respectfully greeted her.

「Un, Rio right? Nice to meet you.」

Dryad let out a sweet smile, that would captivate anyone who witnessed it.

「Now, I wonder if you have some business with me？The Spirit Festival is coming up, right? 」

Gently floating in the air, Dryad directed her gaze towards Arthura and the other three who were kneeling behind Rio.

「Yes. We've come today to seek assistance of Dryad-sama regarding a dormant spirit residing in Rio's body who is of the human race. It is unfortunate but none of us know anything in regards to that spirit.」

Looking at Rio, Arthura stated the reason of their visit.

Dryad's eyes moved back to Rio.

「A spirit inside this child? Certainly I can feel something like that from this child but… do you really not know anything about the spirit sleeping in your body?」

Dryad said that with a curious expression.

「Yes. I really don't know anything.」

No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to recall anything related to a spirit from his memories. That was the reason for his simple reply.

Rio spoke the truth displaying a wry smile.

「So that's how it is.　N—, may I examine you a bit?」

「Yes. Rather, I'd be grateful if you did.」

After receiving his consent, Dryad gently touched his body.

Rio felt a foreign substance entering his body but did not attempt to resist.

「Oh my, you possess an amazing amount of Odo. Such delicacy too. Are you really from the human race? Moreover, yep, there's no doubt that you've formed a contract judging from your completed circu— …eh!?」

While she was confirming the condition of the spirit residing within Rio, her body flinched in surprise.

「Did you find something?」

Noticing Dryad's odd behaviour, Rio asked her.

「…the spirit residing within you is a humanoid spirit.」[TL : Dryad can be considered a part-human, part-plant, and part-fairy, that's why her rank is Quasi High]

Dryad said in a baffled voice.

「!!!?」

Hearing Dryad's words, everyone present except Latifa had an astonished look.

「A humanoid spirit?」

Sensing the apparent change in atmosphere, Rio inquired Dryad further since he was left out of the loop.

「In its current state, I'm unable to figure out anything more other than that it's a humanoid spirit. U~n, just that the humanoid spirit is of considerably high rank. It's not impossible for it to at least be equal in rank as me. I just about as surprised as all of you are since since it's not a type of spirit one usually comes across.」

Dryad briefly explained the situation.

「…By any chance, did you arrive at the Seirei no Tami village around one year ago?」

As if remembering something, Dryad suddenly asked him.

「That's right, I certainly did arrive at the village around that time…」

While affirming Dryad's question, Rio slightly tilted his head to the side, wondering how she knew of that event.

「At that time, I briefly sensed the presence of a powerful spirit. Perhaps it was something akin to a resonance between powerful spirits. The spirit sleeping within you feels similar to the one I felt then. It may have been brief, but the spirit within you should've awoken for a short while. Do you really have no recollections about that time?」

「…No, there isn't.」

Raising his hand to his lips, Rio vigorously searched through his

memories but could not recall anything related.

「U~n. I see. If it's like that, then I give up…」

Dryad said so with a troubled expression.

Her resigned statement struck Rio slightly off balance; it was such an anticlimactic answer.

「Dryad-sama, is the spirit sleeping within Rio-dono's body really a High Spirit?」

At that moment, Arthura gingerly cut into the conversation.

「That can't be possible… According to the legends, the Six High Spirits disappeared from this world over 1000 years ago. No High Spirits have been born after that.」 [TL : Dryad rank is Quasi[Fake] High-rank, while Rio spirit rank is High-ranking[True] spirit]

Part 2

While Dryad made a gesture, as if thinking about something, she emphatically shook her head towards Arthura's question.

It was an event which occurred over 1000 years ago.

The human race lived in the western parts of the Yufilia continent. They lacked the prosperity of the current era and magic did not exist. By forming many small communities, they were barely able to survive. It was a period referred to as the Dark Ages. During this time, six Wise Gods, or seven according to the Seirei no Tami, appeared in mankind's history.

And then, as if to oppose the Six Wise Gods, a power emerged during that time, one that opposed the six wise gods.

It was the demon army, led by their King[121].

They, the demon race, emerged from the depths of the labyrinth situated in the Peninsula of Death, the westernmost point of the Yufilia continent. They rampaged across the surface, annihilating all who opposed them, and begun a campaign of world domination.

Opposing them were the human race lead by the Six Wise Gods.

The Gods bestowed upon mankind the means to wield magic and sacred artifacts. With their newly acquired gifts, the human race waged a long and bloody war against the demons.

The great war was recorded in history as the Demon-God War; a devastating war lasting over a hundred years.

Though the records did not go into great detail about the war, it was known that countless numbers of lives were lost during the struggle. In addition, many magic tools and artifacts used during the war were lost and current technology could not reproduce them.

As the Demon-God War raged in the west of Yufilia, the Seirei no Tami living in the central part of the continent could not remain unaffected for long.

The theatre of war continued to spread and eventually the demon army turned their attention towards the Seirei no Tami. Although they managed to repel the demon army's invasion, the Seirei no Tami suffered heavy losses.

The High Spirits protecting the world at the time became worried about the Demon-God War that was quickly engulfing the whole continent. They decided to ally with mankind and the Six Wise Gods in the ongoing conflict.

Thanks to the participation of the High Spirits on the side of the human race, the demon army was overwhelmed and pushed back to the westernmost point of Yufilia. Unfortunately, the High Spirits were caught in a trap laid by the retreating demon army and all of them vanished.

Then, with the advent of the heroes and their divine armaments, before long the demon army was destroyed bringing an end to the great war.

That was the extent of knowledge known by the human race.

Thinking back to the Demon-God War, Rio pondered about the possible High Spirit Dryad said to be residing in him.

「Perhaps it's a Quasi High Spirit similar to me, but I can't find out anything more about it in its current state.」

Learning that there was a High Spirit possibly residing within him, Rio held an undescribably complicated feeling.

It was only natural that he felt that way because up until now, he had been completely unaware that such a great existence resided in his body.

「Can it not be wakened?」

Thinking it could be awoken like from any natural slumber, Rio threw out a suggestion.

「Since it's fallen into quite a deep slumber, it'd take a considerable amount of power to forcefully awaken it. It'd be best to refrain from doing so though since it's still in the midst of recovery, absorbing your Odo through the circuit connecting the two of you.」

Worrying about the spirit inside Rio's body, Dryad admonished him.

「So that's how it is… I understand.」

Although he still did not completely understand the situation, Rio nodded at Dryad's words. Or rather, there were no other alternatives.

「Seeing how you weren't aware of that spirit, you probably possess some sort of connection with that child before you gained awareness. Because its condition is quite stable during its sleep, it should be recovering at a steady pace. I believe it will awaken in the not too distant future[3].」

Dryad told Rio her conjecture to alleviate some of his worries.

In the end, the investigation into figuring out the true form of the spirit residing in Rio's body was put off because he did not want to trouble Dryad any further. Since it could not be helped, Rio left it as is for the time being.

「Even so, never in my wildest imaginations did I ever think Rio-dono may have contracted a humanoid spirit. Now that it's come to this,

Rio-dono's position within the village do a complete 180 turn.」

Arthura who fell silent in deep thought earlier calmly stated her assessment.

「My position?」

Rio parroted her statement, questioning what she meant by those words.

「Umu, Rio-dono should already know that the Seirei no Tami honour the spirits. That's why those who are able to form contracts with spirits are highly regarded and attain special standings within the country. You should've already known everything up to this point. However, that distinction is elevated even further if the contract is with a Quasi High Spirit or a High Spirit. Rio-done will most likely be treated like a saint among us. No, you will definitely be.」

Sara, Oufia, and Alma all nodded their heads in response to Arthura's words.

「E~tto, a saint…?」

Rio became nervous because even though he had not done anything noteworthy, his status was going to be elevated to such an outrageous level.

「Haha, you don't have to feel so alarmed. Rather you should should consider yourself fortunate. Rio-dono received special permission to come to this place because you were contracted with a mysterious spirit. Now that we've come to know of this, just take heart in the fact that your treatment will improve.」

Arthura laughed cheerfully telling him not to worry.

「But if that's the case, then the next in Spirit Festival…」

Arthura started mumbling to herself seemingly lost in thought.

On the other hand, Dryad subtly directed her attention towards Latifa, who was happily chatting with Uzuma, Alma, Oufia, and Sara.

「You're called Latifa, right? So cute. Please look forward to the

upcoming Spirit Festival, I'll give you a blessing kiss.」[TL : EH, A yuri flag???]

It seemed that Dryad took a liking to Latifa, who looked like a small animal.

「Yes! Please treat me well!」

Latifa returned Dryad's greeting with a beaming smile.

「Haa haa. So adorable… Nee, can I hug you for a bit?」[TL : -_- ……..]

Looking at Latifa with a slightly passionate expression, Dryad eagerly threw her arms around her.

「Fue? Eeh!?」

It seemed the rumour that she had a free spirited personality was true.

Rio smiled wryly at Latifa who was in panic at Dryad's childlike behaviour.

Notes

1. It's said 5 in raw, but I change it to 4 due to the sentence structure] [ED: Japanese inclusivity, when listing people the person himself is included. E.g. I have 4 siblings in english would usually mean 4 brothers and sisters but in japanese it would indicate 3 brothers and sisters plus the person speaking. Or so I'm told.

2. aka Maou

3. WARNING!!! spirits are immortal presence the so called NOT TOO DISTANCE IN THE FUTURE is different from human concept] [ED2: You just killed my anticipation.

Chapter 27

Spirit Festival

Held once a year, it was a festival for the Seirei no Tami to offer their thanks to the spirits.

「Under the compassionate blessings of the great spirits, may their blessings and divine protection forever be with us, the Seirei no Tami…」

The surrounding area was wrapped in a solemn atmosphere. Reciting the prayer dedicated to the spirits were the three elders, Arthura, Dominique, and Syldra, of the Beastmen, Dwarves, and Elves respectively.

At the same time that day, besides the few left as minimum security, the whole population of the Seirei no Tami had gathered in prayer under the Great Tree where Dryad resided.

When the three elders concluded their prayer, wearing ceremonial attire, Oufia, Sara, and Alma performed a dance as an offering to the spirits.

「So pretty…」

It was a breathtaking spectacle to behold.

Next to Rio, Latifa was earnestly watching the three's dance, fascinated and entranced by the mystifying sight.

Dryad was also happily watching the dance performed by the three.

「Everybody! Once again, we are able to safely hold the Spirit Festival this year. All of this could not have happened without everyone's cooperation and prayers to the spirits. I pray that your devotion to your faith in the spirits will never cease to remain

strong.」

Upon completion of the sacred dance, Syldra called out to the people in a solemn voice.

Although he was not speaking in a loud voice, he was using spirit arts to propagate his voice like a megaphone would so it still resounded throughout the whole area.

「Then next, we will be holding the blessing ceremony under the divine protection of Dryad-sama.」

At Syldra's words, Latifa's body trembled.

Every year, it was a custom for the children of the Seirei no Tami who reached a certain age to receive a blessing of the spirits from Dyrad, along with a brief introduction during the Spirit Festival.

Because Latifa was not originally part of the village and joined later in her life, she has already passed the age. However, it was arranged beforehand for her to receive the blessing of Dryad during the festival.

Furthermore, by receiving Dryad's blessing, though not to the degree of a spirit contractor, one's aptitude with spirit arts and their Odo capacity both slightly increased. Therefore, children who receive Dryad's blessing are able to learn spirit arts.

Syldra, Dominique, and Arthura performed a simple introduction for the children of the Seirei no Tami and then one-by-one, introduced them to Dryad for the blessing.

When Dryad blessed the children who came before her by kissing them on their foreheads, their bodies were wrapped in a faint light.

「——In addition, a new friend joined us last year, Latifa from the fox tribe.」

At last, Latifa's name was called. Hearing her name called, she approached Dryad's side.

Perhaps receiving countless stares from the Seirei no Tami caused her to become nervous, her movements were slightly awkward.

Reaching Dryad, Latifa stood upright like a statue[11] causing Rio, who was watching, to smile wryly.

Before long Dryad gave her blessing and Latifa's body was surrounded by a faint light.

「And now, I'd like to introduce the personage who rescued Latifa to everyone here. He rescued Latifa, who was enslaved by a noble of the human race, while being a member of the human race himself, and brought her to our village. At that time, due to a misunderstanding, we treated him poorly, yet he still forgave us.」

At the spot where Dryad gave Latifa her blessings, Syldra began the introduction of the final person.

Latifa was not the only one who was going to be introduced to everyone.

Rio's introduction was also decided beforehand.

「I am pleased to introduce, the benefactor of Latifa and the Seirei no Tami, Rio-dono.」

Climbing the stairs to the altar which was equal in height with the roots of the Great Tree, Rio deeply lowered his head as Syldra introduced him.

Syldra started praising Rio's achievements of bringing many new recipes to the Seirei no Tami.

Furthermore, when it was revealed that Rio was contracted to a Quasi High Spirit, the Seirei no Tami began to noisily talk amongst themselves.

「Silence. It has been confirmed by Dryad-sama that a humanoid spirit lies dormant within Rio-dono's body, there's no mistake about it. We will not ignore one who has made a contract with a Quasi High Spirit. Therefore, we have decided to accept Rio-dono as a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami. As a testimony to that friendship, he will receive a blessing kiss from Dryad-sama.」

Syldra spoke with a clear but solemn voice, instantly silencing the

crowd.

「Fufu, please take care of me. Little hero[Eiyuu] of human race-san.」

In the solemn atmosphere, Dryad smiled sweetly and bestowed the blessing kiss on Rio's forehead.

Immediately Rio's body was wrapped in a powerful light. Following a brief silence, the Seirei no Tami began to applaud in unison.

「Now, the ceremony has concluded. TIME TO PARTY, BABY*! RETURN TO YOUR PREPARATIONS!」[TL* : just a little joke he actually said [It's time for party]]

When the applause died down, Dominique announced the end of the ceremony to dispel the solemn atmosphere.

Afterwards, as per tradition, the open banquet was held in the village with the participation of Dryad. Dominique's words also assisted in lifting the mood of the Seirei no Tami.

Syldra smiled wryly being slightly amazed at the suddenly noisy atmosphere that accompanied the transition to the banquet preparation.

「Umu, well it's something like that. It's not just to hold a grand ceremony but also for the sake of welcoming our new brethrens.」

With Syldra's voice acting as the trigger, the Seirei no Tami orderly dispersed and returned to the village.

「Rio-dono, to accept our unreasonable demands and have a sudden change of heart, there are no words that can properly express our gratitude.」

Thereupon, Syldra deeply lowered his head to Rio in the noisy area surrounding them.

—-

「Please do not mind it since it wasn't a bad proposition for me either.」

Rio smiled weakly while shaking his head.

In the first place, for what reason did Rio become a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami?

It was because after he met Dryad, Arthura quickly and skillfully followed up with the elder council and wrapped everything up.

She [2] informed the elders about the existence of the High Spirit dwelling within Rio and arranged to have him become a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami.

Rio vaguely felt that it was Arthura's goal all along.

Up until then, Rio was regarded as an irregular guest living in the village, despite being a human.

However, he will eventually have to separate from Latifa and leave the village. Whether he will still be recognized when he returned to the village again was another story.

Certainly Rio was a benefactor of the Seirei no Tami and circumstances allowed him to be on friendly terms with them but even so, him belonging to the human race was an element that could not be overlooked.

To freely invite Rio into their village so many times despite being an outsider of another race, it surely could not be said to be a favourable situation for the village administration.

However, it was a different story if he became a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami.

Thus, even if Rio left the village, he would still be recognised upon returning; it also made it easier for him to visit Latifa.

Having anticipated the matter, Arthura took action.

「That said, we've received a lot of help from you. The doubts of the few who still harboured distrust against you have been wiped away as of today. Hereafter, spilling Rio-dono's blood, who is now one of us, means spilling our own blood. I swear upon my name as an Elder.」

Syldra displayed an earnest expression when he spoke.

「Thank you very much. I also swear upon Latifa's name that I shall never turn against the Seirei no Tami.」

That was Rio's answer.

The two floated light smiles and exchanged a firm handshake.

Afterwards, they returned to the village and soon after, the Spirit Festival banquet began.

Food overflowed from every corner of the village square. The Seirei no Tami were chatting amongst one another with cups of sake in hand.

「GAHAHAHAHA! Rio brat, you're quite a skilled drinker!」

Drinking with Rio, Dominique raised a hearty laugh.

「Yes, it's because Seirei no Tami village produces truly magnificent liquor.」

Staring in fascination, Rio emptied his sake cup.

Although a variety of liquor was brought out for the banquet, it would not be an exaggeration to say that they consisted of only the finest grades of liquor with every one of them surpassing anything the human race could produce.

「Of course it is! Since this is genuine liquor brewed only by our country! Not only does it possess the most refined taste, it won't get you drunk, unlike those brewed by humans!」

Dominique laughed energetically, praising his own brewed liquor.

「This is the treasured Spirit Liquor of the Seirei no Tami! Give it a try.」

Dominique retrieved a glass and Karafee[13] made of mithril, poured the liquor and presented it to Rio.

「This is…」

The moment the liquor flowed into the glass, a rich aroma wafted up tingling Rio's nose, intoxicating him by scent alone.

Fascinated by the viscous liquid, he carried the glass toward his lips and poured the contents into his mouth.

In an instant, a shock ran through Rio's body.

The liquor disappeared the instant it entered his mouth, as if it evaporated.

No, the liquor certainly passed through Rio's throat.

However, the flavour was so overwhelming that he instantly swallowed without getting a chance to savour it.

The alcohol was extremely strong and yet easy to drink. With such a exquisite flavour, it lived up to its name of Spirit Liquor.

「How is it? My sap is also included in it.」

Saying such words, Dryad appeared from his side with a sake cup in hand.

「GAHA, GAHA!」 [coughing due to the surprise]

Rio involuntary choked due to her sudden appearance.

「Kyaa, what's with that, geez. What's the matter, for you to suddenly do that?」

Dryad glared lightly at Rio with slightly annoyed smile.

「Sa— SAP!?」[TL : I know this is an old joke, but he thinks it was sap from her honey pot[if you know what I mean]] [ED2: You must be living under a rock if you don't…]

He asked Dryad whether, when she calmly declared that a certain ingredient from one part of her body was used, was true or not.

「It's true. That's why it's called Spirit Liquor. As a spirit, the Great Tree is my main body; the sap is extracted from it to be used in the Spirit Liquor, hence its name. My sap is also an ingredient for a miracle drug.」

Dryad said that while displaying a proud expression on her face. [TL : my side is hurt due to this sap GAG]

「I— I see…」

Certainly, the word supreme was suitable to describe the liquor as there did not exist a drink that could even hold a candle to it. Rio had no doubts the drug was of high quality seeing how the sap could produce such wonderful liquor.

「Nevertheless, you can really hold your liquor. Generally only dwarves are able to drink it undiluted.」

「Really. You're too good to be just a human.」

To Dryad's admiration, Dominique gave a look of approval while calmly gulping down an extraordinary amount of liquor.

「Certainly, this sake is really strong. Despite that, it's really smooth and easy to drink.」

Rio gazed at the glass filled with Spirit Liquor in awe.

「I'mmmm alright.」[ED: Something's coming…」]

—-

With a seemingly cheerful expression, Dryad directed her line of sight behind Rio.

On impulse, he followed her line of sight.

「!!!」

There, he found Oufia with a face so red, anyone could tell she was drunk at a glance. With an unsteady gait, she was seen making her way over to Rio.

「Rio-shyama~, aye~ you dwiink?」[TL : Have better idea for–> Where are you, Rio-sama?]

Rio was dumbstruck at seeing how much Oufia deviated from her usual behaviour. *Flop*, she seated herself beside Rio and spoke as if her tongue could not

「E— Etto, Oufia-san. Perhaps you had one too many of a drink?」

For the time being, Rio worriedly asked Oufia about her condition with cramped smile plastered on his face.

「A— Aa— Aiym fwineee~. Jyis ish nyot enough chu knock mee out~」[TL : I, I'm fineee.] [TL : This is not enough to knock me out]

YOU DON'T SEEM FINE AT ALL! Rio performed a tsukkomi at her in his mind.

Then, for some reason, Oufia brought her body close to Rio, clinging onto him.

「Jyat's nyot itt Rio-hyan! Jyust how long are you going chu keep using a formal tone with usss?」[TL : That's not it Rio-san! Just how long are you going to keep using a formal tone[14] with us?]

「Etto, a formal tone？」

「Jyat's why, icht jyust like you're chwying chu dishtance yourshelf from usss.」 [TL : That's why, it's just like you're trying to distance yourself from us.]

Contrary to her usual quiet and a slightly air-headed nature, the current Oufia looked at Rio with a strange and steady gaze.

Rio winced at the overbearing force of her words.

「Alchough you're very kyose chu Yatita-hyan, you're nyot chwying chu shorten the dishtance with usss. Nothing hash changed shince lasht yearrr.」[TL : Although you're really close to Latifa-chan, you're not trying to shorten the distance between us] [TL : Nothing has changed since last year]

Rio was becoming troubled at how to handle drunken Oufia's passionate speech. When he was about to signal the others for help with eyes, he discovered everyone had abandoned him and his surroundings were deserted.

（OI!）

In the distance, he noticed Dominique and Dryad were grinning

fearlessly at his predicament; Rio tsukkomi'ed them in his mind.

Towards the place where Rio and the drunk Oufia sat, only one person dared to approach.

It was Sara.

「Aaah, geez! Oufia, you're troubling Rio-sama.」

Saying that, Sara also sat down next to Rio with an empty sake cup in her hand.

Though Sara did not seem drunk, Rio's vigilance was at its peak by that point.

Even though Rio referred to them as Oufia and Sara as well as earnestly interacting with them, it did not mean he was close with them. [5]

Latifa usually broke the ice and the conversation flowed from there. Without her, Rio didn't feel close enough to talk to them.

Rather than friends, they were closer to close acquaintances; Rio had interacted with the two while keeping them at a distance.

In spite of that, Sara, as with Oufia, had come over and glued themselves to Rio.

「But, aren't you too distant, Rio-sama? Rio-sama has also received Dryad's blessing and became our sworn friend right? We want to become closer to you.」

Sara looked up at Rio with unfocused eyes.

「Jyats riight. I shecond Shara-shaan.」[TL : That's right. I second Sara-san]

Oufia pulled Rio's arm from the other side in agreement.

(How did it turn this out way?)

For some reason, pulling his hands from both sides were two beautiful girls of high-standings from the Beastmen and High Elf tribes.

A murderous atmosphere arose from the nearby men at his enviable state, but the person himself was unable to enjoy the situation.

「Muu~, Oufia-onee-chan and Sara-onee-chan, how cunning!」

As if to pour oil into the fire, Latifa came and hugged him from behind.

「Latifa, don't tell me you too…」

Turning around to face Latifa who brought her face uncomfortably close to his, he faintly caight the sweet smell of Spirit Liquor drifting from her lips.

In the distance, he could see Arthura laughing merrily seeing him getting into difficult situation.

「Geez, no matter how delicious Spirit Liquor is, the three of them clearly drank too much.」

And, while he was in a daze, another girl called out to Rio in a happy tone.

「Good evening. May I also accompany you?」

It was Alma.

「Of course. It seems Alma-san is the only one who isn't drunk yet.」

As their eyes met, they exchanged a brief greeting and Alma sat in front of Rio with a small bottle of liquor in hand.

「That's only natural since Dwarves are a race who can hold their liquor.」[6]

Alma said that with a slightly flushed face and shy smile.

「Alma-shaan, so cuute~~~」[TL : Alma-chan, so cute~~~]

Oufia suddenly hugged Alma.

「Wawawa, Oufia-nee-san. It's ticklish.」

Even though Alma was embarassed, she allowed Oufia to continue embracing her.

「Even though in the old days, Alma was a crybaby who kept chasing after us from behind. You've grown to become more adult-like recently; Oufia and I have become a little lonely. You also call us "Nee-san" now, no longer "Onee-chan" like how you used to, moreover――」

―-

「WAA, Sara-nee-san! What are you saying!? You're drunk!」

In a panic, Alma hurriedly cut off Sara, who was reciting stories of their childhood.

「I also want to hear stories of Alma-chan's childhood! Right, Onii-chan?」

While happily gazing at the flustered Alma, Latifa stated.

「That's right.」

Rio delightfully agreed to Latifa's words.

「E― even Rio-sama… A― aa― Right! N― now is the time to aim at deepening our friendship with Rio-sama!」

Alma indirectly signalled a temporary cease-fire with Oufia and Sara.

「Jyat's riight. Nyow is zhe time chu become even chloser with Rio-shama!」[TL: That's right. Now is that time to become even closer with Rio-sama!]

Oufia instantly jumped onboard with the idea.

Despite being drunk, her pleading attitude was successfully transmitted to Rio.

「With… me?」

At the incomprehensible request, an uncertain expression surfaced on Rio's face.

「Yes, if you're Latifa's brother than you're also our brother. We have always desired to become better acquainted with you. However, Rio-sama always seems so distant, or rather we weren't able to

seize an opportunity— Nevermind, anyway that's what we've always felt, I hope you understand. Please don't say you dislike us~」

Sara explained their circumstances in a slightly serious [albeit drunk] atmosphere to Rio.

Even though she was laughing through her explanation, it left a strong impression on Rio making him unable to rebut her.

A slight laugh involuntarily leaked out of him.

「Wh— what? Was there something funny about what I said?」

Perhaps it was because she was drunk, or perhaps it was because she felt embarrassed directly confessing how they wanted to be his friends, Sara's face was flushed red when she questioned Rio.

「No, it's nothing. Sorry about that. I wasn't laughing because I found it funny. I'm truly thankful Latifa is blessed with such great friends. I was laughing out of joy.」

「I— Is that so? Then, uhm, that's alright…」

Receiving Rio's gaze upfront, Sara bashfully nodded at his words.

「Now that you mentioned it, I never got the chance to properly express my gratitude for taking care of Latifa. Sara-san, Oufia-san, Alma-san, thank you very much for becoming friends with Latifa.」

With smile, Rio bowed expressing his gratitude.[171]

「N— no. Please don't mind it, since it's only natural for us to do so.」

「Jyat's riight. 」

「It's as Sara-nee-san said.」

As if remembering somthing, the three of them replied to him embarassed.

「And if you're fine with it, please become friends with me.」

Rio lightly bowed his head with smile; a hint of embarassment could be seen on his face.

「Of course!」

The three answered him with extreme delight.

Although they were all slightly intoxicated, the feeling of wanting to become friends with Rio was genuine.

「Fufu, everybody's finally becoming good friends!」

Still clinging onto his back, Latifa joyfully expressed her feelings.

「Ahaha. Something good seems to have worked out. Hey, bring over the liquor and dishes. Let us start deepening our friendship with this.」

Dominique came over while laughing merrily.

Arthura was also following from behind.

「As I thought, you guys had a hand in this right…」

「Hoho, I wonder about that, since it's turned out well, I'll leave it to your imagination.」

Arthura said that while keeping on a good-natured smile.

「Dominique-ooki-jiji-sama[18]. How are we supposed to deepen our friendship with this?」

Looking at the large amount of food and liquor on display in front of her, Alma asked curiously.

「You're a dwarf so you should know. We'll eat, drink, and laugh together!」

Dominique bellowed as he laughed heartily; though loud, his voice was not unpleasant.

「Please don't group me in with that tribe of muscle heads.」

Alma struck down his statement with a cold glare.

「Guha~. Really, this girl. So how's that, Rio-boy. Although she's a bit uptight when it comes to jokes, she has her merits. She's also one of the cutest girls around here. After going through such great pains to

become a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami, why don't you take one of these Seirei no Tami girls here as your wife?」[91]

Domonique began talking about such a thing while smiling radiantly.

Rio remembered that he also said such a thing during their first encounter.

(I wonder how serious he is… But, well it's probably just a joke.)

「P— Please don't start saying something stupid like that!」

Although Rio just smiled and took Dominique's words as a joke, Alma protested with flushed red face.

「That's right. The opinion of the person involved should be respected as well.」

She was surprised that Rio defended her.

「Is that so? So Alma doesn't find Rio-boy agreeable?」

「N— no, I'm not saying that Rio-sama isn't agreeable… It's just that we're still young so we should take one step at a time…」

Alma answered earnestly despite her flushed red face.

「Alma-syaa~n, so cuuut~e. The~n, mee chuu will become~ Rio-syama's waifu~~~」

Oufia said that while stroking Alma's head. It really could not be helped since Alma's reaction was so adorable.

—-

「HOHOHO! Latifa! You won't just yield right? Sara too.」 [Dominique]

「Ya!」[Latifa]

「Wha— why am I also included!?」

In contrast to Latifa's honest reply, Sara protested with a red face.

「Ahaha. All four of you can become his bride. The Seirei no Tami allows polygamy you know~」

Red in the face and holding spirit liquor in one hand, Dominique encouraged them with loud and rattling voice.

「Sheesh, you're dead drunk. This old man really…」

Alma sent an tired look towards Dominique.

It truly was a joyful moment.

It had been a while since he was able to laugh so much like that.

Rio noticed he was also laughing with them.

Just like that, laughing and clamoring, when the entertainer appeared, he noticed most of the Seirei no Tami were absolutely hammered and sprawled out around the plaza.

Soundly sleeping by Rio's side were Latifa, Oufia, and Sara. Even Alma, who was a capable drinker, lay sleeping among them.

Her condition was caused by trying to distract herself from her earlier embarrassment by recklessly gulping down the strong liquor.

「Umu.　This is truly a disastrous scene.」

Uzuma[Arthura] spoke to Rio with a wry smile. [10]

「You could've helped me earlier if you thought so…」

Although Rio's face was somewhat red from being a little tipsy, Rio gave her a straight reply.

「Kakaka, isn't Rio-dono also unusually happy? I can cure everyone's drunkenness immediately using Spirit Arts but I won't do such a boorish thing for the long awaited festival. Since it was everyone's intention to enjoy the festival by getting drunk. It's also good for Rio-dono to cut loose a bit more.」

「No, it was already plenty of fun for me already.」

Returning a feeble, wry smile to the pleasantly talking Arthura, Rio shifted his gaze over to Latifa, who was sleeping with a blissful expression on her face.

When Rio first met her, Latifa was extremely malnourished and had the appearance of only skin and bones. Now, she had a body appropriate for a girl her age in their second growth period.

The scars on her body left from the abuse she received had also completely vanished thanks to the elven medicine she was given.

It was not just her appearance that had improved.

Latifa had become a lively girl who was able to laugh and smile frequently.

However, it did not mean the wounds in her heart were completely cured. Yet from glancing at her peaceful sleeping face, one would never be able to guess that she was formerly a cold-hearted slave.

「I feel it would be best for me to tell her soon.」

He did not specifically say what.

It concerned the issue where Rio was to soon leave the village. However, both of them were aware of the issue despite never openly talking about it.

「I see. It's a bit early but I think this is a good time. You'll be staying in the village for another year right?」

Given the time required to complete the training under Syldra, Dominique, and the others, Arthura roughly deduced how much longer Rio would stay.

「Yes, I'll be staying for at least that long.」

As for Rio, he believed now was the best time to break the news to Latifa whose life had stabilized.

Any later and he might risk not giving her enough time to emotionally prepare herself, so he wanted to tell her as soon as possible and allow her some time to come to terms with it.

「Fumu, it's an issue best left to be dealt with between the two of you. I'll do my utmost to make sure she doesn't feel lonely but it's not a problem a third party like me should meddle in. I wish you all

the best in persuading her, elder brother-dono.」

Captivated by the adorable Latifa sleeping on Rio's lap, Arthura provided Rio with a few words encouragement.

Notes

1. just imagine something similar to when you play an RPG and received stone curse, it was something like that

2. This is the first time the author has said the gender of Arthura as it's usually never used, but why'd they use [Kanojo]? could it be referring to Dryad?

3. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karaffe

4. some info, Rio always using a polite way for speaking

5. He refers to them by their given names

6. I change the context since the real text said Dwarves are a race that's hard to get drunk, it sounds weird right, RIGTH, R-I-G-T-H-!!!] [ED: nope

7. SMILE KITTAAAAAA~!!!!] [ED: He can smile without it being bitter of wry?][TL : only in a veryveryvery rare occassion

8. esteemed great-grandfather

9. He wanted Rio as Alma's partner.][TL : He always trying to do that since their first meeting

10. this might be a typo in name, here the original text said Uzuma, but then it changed to Arthura without a scene where Rio talking with Uzuma can be found

Chapter 28

The Reason for Affection

Part 1

The following day, the Spirit Festival drew to an end. Woken up from the sunlight streaming in from a crevice in the window, Rio was eating breakfast while basking under the warm morning sun in the unpopulated village square. Sitting opposite of him was Latifa.

Everyday Latifa would usually meet with Sara and the other girls to study the required teachings about the Seirei no Tami. However, because today was the day after the Spirit Festival, it was a holiday.

Therefore a long time had passed before they were able to chat like this again.
「It's been almost a year since we came to this village, how do you find it? Are you finding life here enjoyable?」
While happily chatting with Latifa, Rio raised the question as if the thought suddenly occurred to him.
「Umu! It's just as Onii-chan said, this village is truly wonderful and full of kind people!」

To the sudden question, Latifa answered with a broad smile like a sunflower in full bloom. Rio smiled gently at her response.
「I see, by the way Latifa, is it alright with you for us to discuss something?」
Fixating his eyes on Latifa with a renewed determination, Rio spoke.
「E~tto, about what?」
Noticing the change in Rio's atmosphere, Latifa stiffened up in confusion.
「I'm planning on leaving the village in the not so distant future.」
Rio cut straight to point.

[ED: Rio; master of delicacy] [ED2: It's better than tip-toeing around the issue][TL : Sometimes girl prefer more "heating-up" though]
「…」

Bikuri, Latifa's body twitched.
「The preparations… or rather, once I've learned everything that I could from the village, I intend to immediately depart.」

「…N—」
Latifa muttered something in an inaudible voice as Rio calmly announced his intentions.
「That's why, uhm——」

「…NO! ABSOLUTELY NOT!」
Her voice quickly turned into a loud cry interrrupting Rio mid-sentence.
「Latifa… 」
Rio displayed a troubled expression as Latifa clung onto him with the look of a lost child who just found her mother reflected in her eyes.
「Why must you go!? Are you returning to the place of the human race? Even after going through the troubles of befriending the Onee-chans? I don't want you to leave this village!」
Latifa spoke in rapid succession, strongly pleading for him to stay.
「I will be crossing the mountains. There is something I must do out there.」
Rio muttered his reason.
「Why… are you leaving me behind…?」
Latifa looked up at Rio like an abandoned puppy.

Patiently, he gently caressed Latifa's head until she regained her composure.
「Come to think of it, I never did tell Latifa the reason why I was travelling towards the east.」
Now that she had calmed down enough, Rio continued his story in a mutter.

Rio shifted his gaze away from Latifa for a moment and stared into the distance. His focus returned to Latifa again, looking into her eyes.

There, he found tears had accumulated in the corners of her eyes.

「I want to make a grave for my parents in their hometown, because they passed away in a foreign land void of any family or friends. Although they both passed away when I was only a child, I would like to show filial-piety to my parents. Not only that but…」
As Rio was about to say something, he immediately shut his mouth.
「But… What?」
Having suddenly fallen silent, Latifa prompted Rio to continue what he was about to say.
「No, it's nothing.」
Rio laughed in self derision.
「…I, really don't know anything about Onii-chan do I?」
Latifa muttered in feeble voice after a brief silence elapsed between them.
「There are a lot of things I don't know about Latifa too.」
Saying that, he turned towards Latifa with a bitter smile.
「That… That's true, but…」
Latifa nodded even though she was not fully convinced.

Then she closed her eyes, falling into deep thought, and before long, displayed a determined look.
「You know, there are times when I want to tell Onii-chan things about myself. But at that moment… I'd become afraid that Onii-chan may regard what I say as crazy. I wasn't sure if Onii-chan would believe me…」
Rio quickly sensed that Latifa's atmosphere was different from the usual.

Latifa floated an uneasy expression because she was hesitant about prying into his secrets.
「You know, Onii-chan, do you believe in reincarnation?」
She asked in a quiet, clear voice.
「Latifa…」
Rio's eyes dilated as he muttered her name.
「You know, I've already experienced death once. I was originally a human. And now, I've reborn as my current self… Uhm, I know this is difficult to believe but…」
Latifa spoke frantically, unsure of how to organize her words.

Although her words were missing the point, Rio clearly understood

what she was trying to convey to him.

To Latifa who was at a loss for words——
「…I knew that long time ago you know.」
Rio broke the silence.
「…eh?」
Not understanding what Rio meant by his words, Latifa gave out such a voice.
「Latifa originally lived in Japan, right?」
However, Rio struck directly at the secret carried in her heart.
「Wh— Why…」
Although greatly shaken and at a loss for words, Latifa managed to barely voice her doubts.
「*That's because I'm also Japanese.*」[TL : [italic] means that Rio's speaking in the Japanese language, though its look same for me with the usual language he used everyday]
Thereupon, Rio spoke to Latifa in Japanese.
「!!!?」

Latifa's face was dyed in astonishment.
「Japanese… language… Japanese… person… Onii-chan is Japanese?」
Undoubtly, it was an expression where one had witnessed something they never would have expected.
「*That is so. Originally I was, but…*」
Rio spoke in an overly calm tone.
「You knew, you knew about it, yet you kept silent…?」
Dumbfounded, she questioned Rio. It was evident from the emotions on her face that she was beyond surprised.
「Yeah. The first time I cooked pasta was when I realised Latifa was a reincarnated Japanese person. At that time you said『Spaghetti』right? Pasta isn't a dish that originally existed in this world. Not only that but you also say "Itadakimasu" before every meal.」
To the Latifa who was at a lost for words, he switched back to the present world's native language and explained how he concluded that she was formerly Japanese.
「W— Why!? Why didn't you say anything!?」

At Rio's explanation, Latifa unintentionally became emotional and

fired off questions at him.
「Why? Why were we reincarnated? Why did we regain our memories? I had lots of time and mulled over the possible reasons. But you know, I've always wondered why we retained memories from our previous life, but what of it? We've already become inhabitants of this world. Even if we were able to return, we've already lost our place in that world.」
Rio chuckled gloomily as he said those words.
「……」

Although he had not conveyed all the thoughts he accumulated over the years to Latifa, she was still able to pick up a portion of what he wanted to say from the small snippet of his thoughts.

However, from her befuddled expression, it could be seen that she had only just realized the many things pointed out by Rio.

「However I told you these things so I won't be leaving you you with any regrets. That's what I thought.」
Rio spoke with a deep sigh.
「Then, why now…」

「That is because Latifa told me about her previous life. Honestly, I was planning on telling you about my previous life if you ever decided to speak about yourself.」
Latifa listened in silence as Rio spoke.

Part 2

「Besides, I provided hints about the possibility that I was Japanese, like the dishes I made and their names. Their names were from our previous world right? Yet Latifa just accepted them without question.」

「Ah……」
It seemed she never gave it a second thought since it was presented so casually. Latifa's expression looked like she had finally realized something.
「And I would like to tell you another thing. I already told you when we first started our journey that we'd only travel together up until the

Seirei no Tami region. That was my intention at first. It was for my own selfish reasons that I helped Latifa since if possible, I did not want you to become a murderer.」
Rio spoke to Latifa, full of determination.
「……」

However at Rio's words, Latifa could only absentmindedly stare at him without a word.
「However, when I discovered that you were a former Japanese [person], I became truly sympathetic with your circumstances. Soon after, you came to look up at me like your own brother.」
At that time, Latifa came to understand the affection Rio was trying to convey despite his indifferent tone.
「I was worried. What was I to do with you? Initially, I only saved you because of my half-hearted reason and selfish pride, but before I realised it, you became an irreplaceable existence to me.」
With an expression akin to distress or something, Rio briefly glanced at Latifa.
「Thus I decided to accompany you here and have the village take you under their care. In no way did I expect for us to stick together for so long.」
Rio briefly paused his story and stared at Latifa with a serious expression.

Under his piercing gaze, Latifa slightly flinched.
「Latifa, I'm just a hypocrite who sympathized with you, masquerading as your guardian to satisfy my own self-righteous sense of duty. Truthfully, I probably don't deserve being called "Onii-chan" by you. No, I certainly don't. So it's fine if you no longer think of me as your Onii-chan.」
Revealing everything he had to say, Rio silently waited for Latifa's reply.

Thus, it was nothing more than complacency now that he had told Latifa everything.

So, it was fair if she resented him for it.

He had already resolved himself when he told her the truth.

Before long, Latifa closed her eyes in contemplation. Biting her lips,

she looked up at Rio having found her resolve.
「Finally… Finally, am I able to understand your heart. Why this person saved me. Why this person treated me so kindly. Even though these questions continued to linger in the corner of my mind, I didn't dwell upon it and told myself that it was because this person was my Onii-chan. Even so, the kindness I received from you was genuine.」
Suddenly, Latifa began to speak in Japanese.
「…That kindness was fake, you know.」
Rio replied curtly with slightly widened eyes.
「No. It was definitely real. Because, I am very sensitive to human malice. The humans treated me like a pet, directing their malice and beating me everyday.」
Latifa revealed a smile containng hints of self-derision.
「I am extremely sensitive to human malice. Despite that, I reached the point where I no longer knew of any other way to live other than to submit to my human masters. Therefore, I wondered, how much of my selfishness would this person tolerate and when would he scold me? You appeared to be kind so I said I wanted to follow you, but from the onset, I was observing you to see what kinds of malicious intent you had.」
Latifa spoke with an evidently sad expression.
「However, after talking to you, such thoughts immediately disappeared. Because the affection I received from you felt the same as the affection I received from my mother in this world.」
Latifa turned and, with a seemingly passionate gaze, looked at Rio. [TL : lovely gaze of a loli]
「When I first met you, I was a broken, hollow individual, not the cheerful one you see now. To me such a thing, you… you, granted me this world, everything. Affection, freedom, peace, happiness, joy, family, friends. That's why——」[TL : please don't forget that despite her radiating loli charm, she's still a former loli assassin] [ED2: Loli assassin is fine but lovely loli… I don't… know…….]

[TL : She's braver than 20 years old me]
After a brief pause, Latifa opened here mouth with renewed determination.
「That's why… Even so, may I continue calling you Onii-chan?」

It was then that Rio noticed that Latifa, as well as himself, from the very beginning were both anxious.
「…Yeah, even if I leave the Seirei no Tami village, Latifa will always be my beloved little sister.」
Rio deeply nodded, floating a tranquil smile on his face.
「Onii-chan!」
At that point, overcome with emotion, Latifa threw her arms around Rio, embracing him in tears.

Rio firmly caught her.

It was unknown how long the two remained like that.

Rio continued to soothe the crying Latifa.

Without know why, Latifa's crying comforted him.

Eventually when she finished crying, Latifa, whose face was buried in Rio's chest, looked up at him.
「…You know, I'm still immature so Onii-chan doesn't have to go along with my selfishness. But, I want to know more about Onii-chan. So that when Onii-chan leaves the village, I won't feel lonely. That's why, will you tell me about your previous life, Onii-chan?」
With that, Latifa broke the silence between them.

Rio slightly nodded with a glimpse of a lonely smile.
「That's right… though I don't think it's really interesting, if that's alright with you.」
He told her so while gently stroking Latifa's head, who was smiling bashfully.

And then, Rio spoke about his past life.

How he was formerly a University student, the girl who was his childhood friend, how he developed a lifelong love for her, and how his feelings were never rewarded because she disappeared.

Similiarly, Latifa told Rio about her previous life.

How she was formerly an elementary school student, the many friends she had, how both her parents were occupied with work and she often found herself alone at home, and how despite that, her

family still shared a good relationship.

Mostly surprisingly was perhaps how both of them passed away in the same traffic accidents.

The two kept sharing stories of their previous lives until they noticed dusk had fallen.

It was on that day that the two became siblings in the truest sense of the word.
「Oya oya. This is… The two of you seem closer than usual. I take it that everything went well?」
Upon returning home, Arthura questioned them while staring in awe at Latifa who was clinging onto Rio.

「Yeah… I told Latifa about how I'll be leaving the village soon.」
Reacting to Arthura's gaze, Rio reported the results of their discussion.
「Yah! You know, I've decided to earnestly wait for for Onii-chan's return after he's left the village.」

Seeing Latifa's carefree smile, tears trickled from Arthura's eyes.
「Hoho… I've become easier to be moved to tears with each passing year… Rio-dono, I truly thank you for saving this child.」
Arthura clasped Rio's hands in honour to him.

Chapter 29

Departure

In the blink of an eye, one year has passed since the Spirit Festival.

Having become a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami, Rio spent the remaining time deepening his relationship with them further than he ever had with anybody from the human race.

He held numerous cooking classes, sparred with Uzuma and other Seirei no Tami warriors, and provided assistance around the village, among a variety of other things.

One day, near the day of his departure for Yagumo, Rio received a summons from the elder council.

「Umu, sorry for calling you so abruptly.」

Upon entering the room, Arthura, Dominique, and Syldra warmly welcomed him.

「It's not a problem. Was there something you'd like to discuss with me today?」

Despite the age gap, they treated each other as friends.

Rio also greeted them with a light smile.

Then Syldra quickly cut to the chase and spoke on the other two's behalf.

「That's not why we called for you today. As a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami, we would like to offer our assistance for your journey. First, please accept this.」

A mithril bracelet embedded with a spirit gem and system contract was presented to Rio.

「This is…」

Rio was amazed at its elaborate design.

「This is a spirit tool called the Space-Time Repository[1]. When the spirit gem absorbs the Odo of its registered owner, the dimension magic installed in it can create a spatially isolated domain.」

Upon completing registration, one would only need to inject Odo into the bracelet and chant『Storage』while touching it to stow away items. Similarly, to withdraw an item, they would need to supply the bracelet with Odo and chant『Discharge[2]』while picturing the object they wanted to remove. The amount of item that could be stored in the ring was proportional to the owner's magical power[3].

「…I do not believe I deserve to be given something this valuable.」

Rio was surprised to hear the effects of the Space-Time Repository and tried to decline the gift.

For the human race, it was a considerably precious artifact from the time of the Demon-God War.

Rio could not even begin to imagine its worth.

「Don't worry. Think of this as a symbol of our friendship. Besides, while you have received much from us, Rio-dono has also taught us many things.」

However, Syldra did not retract the gift presented on his outstretched hands.

While being taught about the Seirei no Tami from Arthura, Rio also imparted knowledge from his previous life to the Seirei no Tami which he deemed beneficial to the development of the village.

He casually suggested everyday items such as glasses, nail clippers and scissors, cooking recipes and seasonings, farming tools, and even forms of entertainment like chess, shogi, and playing cards. He even went as far as to intervene in passing of laws and legislation.

As such, Syldra drew up the various achievements he accomplished to pressure him into accepting the gift.

「But…」

Still, Rio did not feel that his achievements warranted such a valuable gift.

Unconvinced, he stubbornly continued to insist otherwise.

「It's fine, just accept it already. It's proof that you're our sworn friend. Besides, it's not the only gift.」

Domonique spoke in his usual characteristic fashion. [ED2: A laid back way of speaking; occasionally dragging out words.]

「My gift to you is a specially crafted set of dwarven-made armor. It was crafted a bit larger than your current size since you're still growing. I'll readjust it when you return to the village.」

He had noticed the suit of armor that was sitting in the back of the room earlier but never thought it would be presented as a gift for him.

「No way…」(ED3「Nai waa」)

He was bewildered because from just a glance, he knew that it was an unrivaled suit of armor.

「It's alright, just take it already. It was crafted for your exclusive use. Nobody else will be able to wear it 'cause they'll be rejected.」

And so, Dominique began to explain the armor's features.

A one-handed mithril sword, mithril fiber cloth armor, black dragon leather armor, gauntlets, boots, and long coat[14]. Despite none of the items even coming close to rivalling the value of the Space-Time Repository, they were pieces of equipment that even the greatest human blacksmiths would be hard-pressed to match.

At just 14 years of age, Rio, who was in the midsts of his growth period, was rapidly approaching 170 cm in height. At his current growth rate, it would be no surprise if he reached 180 cm[15].

Either way, he made the most out of his growth period.

「This much armor is…」

Rio muttered in fascination of the armor's many features.

「Good craftsmanship right? I personally crafted various pieces of the armor.」

Dominique displayed a triumphant expression.

「Well then, Dominique isn't the only one with a gift for you. I've prepared some common elven potions. I've included a memo with the various potions' uses and instructions on how to use them.」

With that said, Syldra handed a piece of paper to Rio and notioned at a large wooden box sitting at the side of the room.

It seemed like the potions were stored inside.

The elven potions were concocted with the use of spirit arts making them extremely valuable. Their effects were far beyond anything humans could create.

Listed on the memo were various potions including elixirs and panaceas astonishing Rio as he read through its contents. [TL : it's already mention before that main ingredients for elixir is the Dryad ____ juice, AHEM, I mean Dryad SAP] [ED3: so the dryads get their juice from Sora and Shiro?][TL : Is there any Dryad in NGNL?] [PF: no but mermaids might be close to how dryads how usually said to be for where i read up to]

「Is it really alright for you to give me elixirs and panaceas?」

「Hahaha, no need to feel reserved. Isn't it possible for Rio-dono to make them as well as long as you have the ingredients?」

Glancing at Rio, Syldra spoke in carefree manner.

「Aren't the ingredients quite valuable?」

Many of the ingredients used were incredibly difficult to grow in human territories.

Dryad's sap was also included amongst them.

「Oh, they're only difficult to find in human territory but that's not the case around the village. Please don't hesitate to take it.」

At a loss for words, Rio could only bow his head at their kindness.

「Now then, only I'm left. From me, I've prepared enough food to easily last you five years. I've only brought a portion of the food with me since all of it wouldn't have fit in here. You can store the rest in your Space-Time Repository later.」

Arthura told him five years worth of food was prepared for him, as if hinting for him to return after five years. Even though it was an absurd amount of food, all of it could be preserved without spoiling in the Space-Time Repository. Never in his wildest imagination did he ever think he would receive a Space-Time Repository as well as support from the three elders.

「But… I still don't see how I deserve your generosity. Why offer me so much…?」

Part 2

Rio could only mutter in confusion at receiving so much support.

「For saving our brethren Latifa, letting bygones be bygones, your various contributions to improving the village's quality of life, as well as becoming our sworn friend and contracting with a Quasi-High Spirit. With everything you've done for us, how can we not return the favour? 」

Syldra answered Rio's doubts.

「This is something that we, the Elder Council, have decided upon. Having seen what you've contributed to the Seirei no Tami, this is the answer we've arrived upon after much deliberation. By all means, please accept our gifts.」

He spoke from the bottom of his heart in an unwavering tone.

Pressured by their gazes, Rio opened his mouth.

「…For all of your sincerity and generosity, I cannot thank you enough. If the time ever comes when the Seirei no Tami faces a crisis, as your sworn friend, I vow to come to your aid.」

Bowing deeply to display his gratitude, Rio simultaneously pledged his support.

☆★☆★☆★

A few days after attending Spirit Festival for the second time, the time finally came for Rio to depart.

「Everyone, for taking care of me during these past two years, I deeply thank all of you.」

Rio expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all those who came to see him off.

「Farewell Onii-chan!」

Regretful of his departure, Latifa persistently clung onto Rio.

「Latifa, don't make it so difficult for Rio-san to part.」

Sara reprimanded Latifa who was stuck to Rio like super glue.

「Since we won't be able to meet for a while, I need to replenish as much Onii-chan energy as I can right now! If you want, this is also Sara-onee-chan's last chance to get some skinship with Onii-chan!」

Having said that, Latifa finally separated herself from Rio.

「Wha— I— it's not like I want a hug!」[ED2: Tsundere kita!!!]

Sara vehemently denied Latifa's suggestion with a flushed red face.

「Fu~nn. Even though Oufia-onee-chan and Alma-onee-chan are giving their proper farewells…」

Latifa sent a fleeting glance at where Rio was standing.

「Eh~ Ah!」

In the midsts of her hesitation, she noticed that Oufia and Alma had already approached Rio.

「Please take care of yourself Rio-san. Let's cook together again when you return!」

Smiling sweetly, Oufia gave him her blessings and lightly embraced him.

It was a custom of the Seirei no Tami to embrace the other party in such a fashion when expressing their affection to a person they were especially close with. However, it was definitely not something to be done casually with someone from the opposing sex of the same generation. To be able to unabashedly do so in front of others could be attributed to Oufia's sincere nature. Her slightly airheaded personality and naturally sunny disposition always brought a smile to those around her.

「Of course. I'll be on the lookout for new recipes and ingredients during my travels. And of course good tea leaves too.」

Oufia loved to cook as her hobby and with only the exception of during cooking classes, often cooked together with Rio.

Aside from that, she was considerably fond of tea and frequently discussed methods of preparing tea with Rio during their teatime.

Rio made a mental note to buy any good ingredients and tea leaves for her when he had the chance.

When Oufia released her embrace, it was Alma's turn to bid him farewell.

「Ple— Please take care of yourself. I pray no harm befalls you on your journey.」

Having said her farewell, Alma lightly embraced Rio with a reddened face. Since their heights differed by nearly 40 cm, if one did not know, they would have thought the two were adult and child. An intelligent girl who would constantly try to exceed her limits, that was Rio's impression of Alma. And yet there existed a discrepancy in her character. As a result of being pampered too much, she occasionally lowered her guard towards the other party. [ED2: Is this what they call gap moe?][TL : yes, and yes]

「Thank you. If I find any notable liquor, I'll be sure to bring some back for you.」

「Uh— …Yes. I'd be grateful if you can bring some.」

Whether it was due to her natural disposition as a dwarf or that she was born with the love for alcohol, Alma was quite a heavy drinker. Rio was able to grasp her preferences from exchanging drinks with her on many occasions. Rio wondered if liquor was an appropriate souvenir for her. With her reddened face, Alma was unable to deny her curiosity for exotic liquor and requested Rio to procure some for her.

「Look, Sara-onee-chan too!」

Seeing Oufia and Alma had finished up their farewells, Latifa pushed Sara towards Rio.

「Wah! Hey, Latifa. Ah— uhm, Rio-san!」

Sara was frozen stiff from embarrassment in front of Rio. [TL : DAMN IT!!! NOT HER TOOOO!!!] [ED: I'm really missing the teacher waifu, the one he promised to write to but hasn't for two years.] [ED2: I miss her too…]

They often sparred against each other though it always ended up being Rio's victory. Feeling mortified with each further loss, Sara gradually turned desperate and her attitude became that of a sore loser. Once she realised it, she panicked and became incredibly flustered; such an amusing girl. On the other hand, she was an earnest girl who was generally softhearted to everyone, though could become stern when the situation called for it. She trained in martial arts under Rio for a year and even referred to him as shishou [6].

「Yes, what is it Sara-san?」

Recalling the times when he was able to catch a glimpse of her embarassed face during their mock battle, Rio could not help but smile.

「Ple— Please allow me to train under you again when you return!」

Sara blurted out the first thing that came to her mind and hurriedly gave Rio a light embrace.

「Of course. I will also find some souvenirs for Sara-san so please look forward to it.」

「Yes. I'll be waiting. Take care of yourself!」

Smiling brightly, Sara also prayed for Rio's safety.

And then came Uzuma, who was patiently waiting for Sara to wrap up her farewell.

「Rio-dono. Take care of yourself. Like Sara-san, I'm also looking forward to our next match. I will continue refining the martial arts skills you have taught me.」

Uzuma was one of the few opponents who forced Rio to go all out during their mock combat. He respected her as a strong, polite, and proud individual. Not only that but their compatibility was quite high as well. Before he became aware of it, she had become a worthy rival for him. Moreover, she was also one of those who studied martial arts under Rio.

Unlike the human race, the Seirei no Tami never fought amongst themselves, only ever taking up arms for hunting or against demons. As a result they did not possess anti-personnel combat techniques. They fought solely based on instincts resulting in being able to perform at only half of their combat potential. Therefore despite their tremendous physical prowess, against an opponent well-versed in anti-personnel combat, their opponent could easily exploit their dull movements. That was the primary motivation behind why Rio decided to teach them martial arts for the year.

With only a year of training, they still had a long way to go but they all displayed great potential. Uzuma did not embrace Rio like the others had but instead the two promised a rematch with a firm handshake.

「Likewise. Please look forward to a souvenir from me too, Uzuma-dono.」

「Thank you very much. May the fortune of war watch over you. Take care.」

Part 3

Floating a refreshing smile, Uzuma bowed and retreated back to the others.

「Haha. Well then, since I'll feel bad if you're held back for too long, I will bid you farewell on behalf of the other elders. Remember that you are always welcome in the Seirei no Tami village. This is your home as much as it is ours. 」

The three eldest of the Elder Council came to see him off on behalf of the others.

「That's right, come back anytime!」

With a hearty laugh, Dominique firmly grasped Rio's arm with his small but solid body.

「Indeed, all of us will be waiting for your return. May the spirits guide you on your journey.」

With a serene smile, Syldra recited a short prayer for Rio's safety.

「I am greatly indebted to everyone here. Allow me to say it once more. Thank you very much.」

Rio bowed deeply causing the three elders to become slightly embarassed.

「Well then, I guess I should depart soon. Prolonging this any longer would make it increasingly difficult for me.」

「You're right. Then, before that…」

Arthura glanced behind her.

「See you later! Onii-chan!」

As if to proclaim it was the final farewell, Latifa came over once more and strongly hugged Rio.

「Yeah, I'm off. See you later, Latifa.」

He gently caressed Latifa's head and before long with great reluctance, turned on his heel.

「Everybody! It is my [17] greatest honour to be able to spend time with the Seirei no Tami. Despite my unworthy self, you have allowed me to become your sworn friend. For this and everything you have done for me, I would like to express my most sincere and heartfelt thanks.」

Saying so in a loud voice, Rio invoked spirit arts to manipulate the wind and slowly ascended his body into the air.

「Well then! I look forward to the day we meet again!」

Bidding his final farewell, Rio lightly waved his hand and soared towards the horizon, vanishing into the distance.

The Seirei no Tami people continued waving until they could no longer see his figure.

「He's gone isn't he?」

No longer being able to see Rio, Alma murmered in a daze.

「Sara-onee-chan, Oufia-onee-chan, Alma-onee-chan, I definitely won't lose.」

Latifa spoke up while still gazing off into the sky.

「…E~tto, you won't lose?」

Sara responded in bewilderment to Latifa's abrupt claim.

「There exists a person who has already occupied Onii-chan's heart. That person isn't me or anyone of us. Nevertheless, someday I will have ~~senpai~~ Onii-chan notice me. So I wanted to let Onee-chans know that I won't back down even if any of you are also aiming for Onii-chan. Well, I don't think I have to watch out for Sara-onee-chan since she only sees Rio-onii-chan as an elder brother.」

Latifa sent Sara a fearless grin.

「Wha— I— It’s not like I particularly care!」[ED2: Tsun~Tsun]

With her face redder than a tomato, Sara said some vague words that could not be clearly interpreted.

「Fufu, you’re not being honest Sara-san.」

Oufia poked some fun at Sara while smiling mischeviously.

「Honestly. It’s no good for you to be shy to the point of dishonesty.」

Alma only shook her head in disappointment as if to say “it can’t be helped”.

「I— Isn’t it the same for you!?」

「I properly displayed my appeal back then though.」

Alma spoke quickly, turning her head to the side.

Thanks to the many years they had spent together, Sara undersood that Alma’s attitude was one where she was trying to conceal her own embarassment.

「See, I was right! Aren’t you also shy and not being honest with yourself?」

「Now isn’t the time to argue about something like that.」

With that, the rivalry between the four girls began to heat up.

If Rio was present, he would have amusingly watched them from the side with a smile.

The surrounding Seirei no Tami also sent the four noisy girls heartwarming gazes.

998th year of the Sacred calendar.

Seven years had passed since Rio had regained his memories.

The historical moment that changed the world was drawing near.

Author Note :

Dear readers, it has been a heartwarming story up until this point.

The second act has finished with this and the next story is six side chapters.

Though there is one part some readers may find disagreeable, it is a vital part of the second act and will supplement the story since it is not touched upon in the main story. I hope you will enjoy it.

Notes

1. so it's combination of WUXIA, XIANXIA, and DORAEMON 4D pocket this time] [ED2: Basically a woman's purse…] [TL: so A woman purse is endless? no wonder my wife….

2. Written as "Release"

3. not MANA, but magical power

4. Mithril set complete!!! speed+300%, power+200%, Accuracy+400%, Killing Rate+500%, Drop+999% [enemies' head, that is], Sharpness+999% [will be explained much later], Defense+999%[mainly due to his flag breaking traits], luck+100%] [ED2: None of those stats are canon by the way.

5. I don't know about the average growth for western people, but the average growth in my country at that age is around 160 cm[male] and 155 cm[female]] [ED: 172 cm for males and 158 cm for females in my country.] [ED2: He's ridiculously tall for a 14 year-old…] [ED3: A westerner arrives. average for my country is 152 cm.][TL : I though western womens is around 170 cm?

6. Master

7. Rio using Waga to said "my" in this occasion; a very formal way of referring to oneself

Latifa Side Story

Part 1

Author Note :
This is Latifa's story, before and after her reincarnation, until the time she met Rio.

Because she was born into slavery, the latter half of the story may contain sensitive content.

Please steel yourself before continuing.

However, it is not as heartbreaking as the main story.

My name is Endou Suzune. I was 9 years old, a 4th grade elementary school student.

The seasons shifted over to summer just the other day and the summer holidays have started.
However I still go to school everyday as long as the pool is open.
Even though it was summer holidays, many students still come to the pool at school to meet with their friends, including myself.

Sorry, forgive me.
I lied.
I'm also looking forward to meeting my friends but to tell the truth, that isn't the only reason.
The truth is, I want to ride the *bus* home.

(Ah Yay! I caught it today too!)

Even today, on my way home after swimming, Onii-san is already on the bus.
He's awfully refined. Not only that, he looks so cool. I wouldn't be surprised if he was a model or actor. I really admire him[11].

I don’t know his name nor his age though. If I had to guess, hes probably a college student.
The Onii-san always takes this bus at the same time of day.
Perhaps he’s a person who likes to follow a set pattern.
I also commute to the pool, though only by bus on the way back. All of this just to catch a glimpse of Onii-san.

However Onii-san isn’t only handsome, he’s also really kind-hearted[1][2].

How do I know? Well, Ill have to recount how I met Onii-san.
That’s right, I met Onii-san over a year ago.
Perhaps Onii-san has already forgotten about it, but I still remember our encounter like it was yesterday. It was Onii-san who came to my rescue.

That day, I happened to take the bus home which I rarely ever used before.
It was raining cats and dogs since the afternoon. My home is quite far so to walk back in that deluge was a definite no-no.
So, I decided to return by bus.
Okaa-san always had me keep some change on me for such days.
But that day, I was dead tired from the preparations for the athletic meet and slept past my stop.
I didn’t have enough money for a return trip since I rarely ever needed to make more than a single bus trip. I was at a lost at what to do and bursted into tears on the bus.
It was Onii-san who called out to me then.

「What’s wrong? Did you take the wrong bus?」

Suddenly calling out to me in a gentle voice, Onii-san was standing there in front of me when I lifted my face.
Maybe its a bit of an exaggeration, but at the time I mistook Onii-san for a character from a popular shoujo manga I read.

「Uhm Uh I overslept and missed my stop.」

I responded to him in a daze.

「Oh, I see. Which stop was it?」

Onii-san spoke in an understanding manner.
When I told him my stop—

「Then, let's get off together at the next stop.」

He spoke in a gentle voice to calm me.
I was taught to not follow strangers, yet I believed I could trust Onii-san.

「Ah but I don't have enough money」
「Dont worry about that.」

Reassured by his words, I got off with Onii-san at the next stop.
By the way, Onii-san said he'd pay for me.
After that, with unwavering confidence, Onii-san chose and boarded a bus. I didn't want to be rude so I just silently followed Onii-san.

「I know normally you shouldn't follow strangers, but this is an emergency so please make this an exception.」

Onii-san mistook my silence as suspicion and tried to reassure me with a wry smile.

「Tha— That's not it. You're mistaken!」

I denied him in a panic, though it may have had the opposite effect of what I was hoping for instead.
After that, Onii-san started a few conversations with me so I wouldn't feel awkward.
Honestly, I was so nervous the entire time I wasn't able to remember anything he said.
Now that I think about it again, that was the only time I was able to speak with Onii-san. I cant believe I missed the chance to get to know him better. What was I thinking?
I hate how shy I was back then.
The trip back was short but for me, it passed in the blink of an eye.

「Do you know your way from here?」

Onii-san asked me that when we arrived at my correct stop.

「Eh? Ah…」

At that time, I snapped back to reality from my dreamlike state.

(This is the end?)

No, I don't want that!
I haven't thanked him yet.
I was often told that I was very timid, but only then did I truly realise that.

「Tha— Thanks! Thank you! For covering my bus fare too!」

Before I realised it, my voice came out in a frenzy.

「Its fine, its fine. You don't have to thank me for it. Anyone would've done the same.」

He responded as though it was only natural.
However, I didn't think so.
Onii-san's kindness was different from those of my friends and teachers.
A kind of selflessness. That's right, it was like that of Okaa-san's and Otou-san's.

「Ah… Don't…」

I stammered out some words as Onii-san was about to leave.
There were still so many things I wanted to tell him, but the words wouldn't come out of my mouth.
I didn't know what to do and I nearly cried unintentionally.

「Ah… Uhm… You're welcome?」

Onii-san relented and decided to stay.
Probably because I was on the verge of crying.

「Tha Thank you very m— hic!」

As I tried to express my gratitude, I accidentally bit my tongue because of my overwhelming anxiety.
Onii-san chuckled when he saw me.
I was so ashamed.

「Tha— thank you very much…」

My face was burning up when I thanked him a second time.

「You're welcome.」
「Ye— Yes. Likewise…」

Afterwards, I guided Onii-san back to my house.
It took around a minute by foot from the bus stop to my house.
I rang the bell when we arrived.
Shortly after confirming the figures of Onii-san and I through the intercom camera, Okaa-san came out to greet us.

「Welcome home, Suzune. Did something happen?」

Okaa-san wore a worried expression as she glanced at Onii-san.

「Yo— You must thank Onii-san! Onii-san saved me, uhm, so thats why…」

At the incoherent words I was spouting, Okaa-san became even more confused.

「Actually—」

To clear up my unintelligible explanation, Onii-san explained the circumstances.

「Ara ara, I'm sorry this child has caused you so much trouble. I'm deeply grateful.」

Okaa-san deeply lowered her head whilst expressing her gratitude to Onii-san.

「Don't worry about it. I'm just glad I was able to bring her home safely. Well then, Ill be excusing myself.」

Onii-san bid farewell with a smile and prepared to leave[3].

「Uhm, would you like to come in for some tea before you leave?」

Then Okaa-san tried to prevent Onii-san from leaving immediately.
Nice Okaa-san[4]!

「I'm sorry but I must decline your offer since I have my part-time job after this. Your generosity is enough for me. Thank you.」

Unfortunately, it seemed like Onii-san had work and was unable to stay.
Okaa-san immediately went into the house and returned with a rather generous amount money as compensation for the fare Onii-san covered for me.
Even though Onii-san obstinately tried to refuse it, Okaa-san was also quite assertive and made him accept it.
And so Onii-san left while apologetically thanking Okaa-san.

「He was an awfully considerate person wasn't he?」

As she saw Onii-san off, Okaa-san voiced her impression of him.

「Yeah…」

It's not only that.
He's really handsome too[151].

「And really handsome too, right Suzune?」

Said Okaa-san, as if she was reading what I think.

「Yeah… huh!?」

I was baited and unintentionally replied what was on my mind.
In a panic, I looked up at Okaa-san and saw her smiling broadly at me.
My face instantly flushed deep red.

「Ufufufu, you'll tell me everything that happened in detail won't you?」

It's impossible for me to keep a secret from Okaa-san.

「Do you want to take the bus starting tomorrow?」

After I told her what happened that day and how I met Onii-san, Okaa-san suddenly proposed such a thing.

「Eh? I— Is it alright!?」

I unintentionally let out an excited voice.

「It's fine. Get along with Onii-san okay?」

Okaa-san chuckled as she permitted it.
I never told her I was interested in him but my feelings were easily discovered by Okaa-san.
Okaa-san is amazing.

And so, I began commuting by bus starting the next day.
I caught the bus at the same time as the day before and *Pin Pon!*, Onii-san was there.
Just like the day before, Onii-san was sitting by the window, third seat from the rear.
I noticed him immediately because there were so few people on the bus during that time.
However, my shyness prevented me from calling out to him and I instead hurriedly took a seat diagonally behind Onii-san.
I stole discreet glances at him so he wouldn't notice.
After a while, Onii-san seemed to have noticed my glances and turned around.
I quickly averted my gaze in a hurry.
I think Onii-san noticed me but he didn't call out to me.
I was both relieved and disappointed at the same time.

After that, I continued commuting by bus for over a year.
I wasn't able to see him in the morning but I always saw Onii-san during my return trips.
It seemed like he somehow got on the bus at around the same time everyday.
I'd hide in the corner of the bus and periodically steal glances at him.
I'm sure my spying skill has developed considerably over the year.
Today too, I am watching Onii-san.
There was another person. A pretty high school girl who also frequently took this bus at the same time. She, like myself, would also often passionately stare at Onii-san[161].
I won't lose to her.

Besides that, I often see Onii-san listlessly staring out the window.

(I wonder why…)

I'm worried but don't know how to help him.
I want to call out to him but I can't help but wonder, "Does he still

remember me?” I want to talk to him. Yet, not having made a move after all this time has made me incredibly anxious.
Okaa-san had provided me with the encouragement I needed to take the first step but I failed to make any further progress after that.

(How ‘bout I just greet him? Whatever happens, happens.)

Just as I’m thinking that, the bus shakes violently and my consciousness fades away.

I open my eyes. A dimly lit room surrounded by stone walls comes into view.

（Where… am I?）

It’s cold. I hug myself in an attempt to warm myself.
The only thing covering my body is a thin rag.
I roughly pull a blanket off the crude bed and wrap it around myself. Even if it barely helps warm me up, I’m desperate for any warmth I can find.
As I reach out for the blanket, my hand comes into view. It is much smaller than the one I’m used to seeing. Not only that, it’s ghastly white and horrifically thin to the point that it’s practically just bone wrapped in skin.

（Eh…?）

The colour of my hair is clearly not the black of a typical Japanese.
Then, I realise the most unusual phenomenon that occurred.
That’s right, I possess memories that don’t belong to me.
The memories of a slave girl by the name of Latifa.

(Wh— Wh… y…?)

My body begins to tremble little by little, and it’s not because of the cold air.

（This… This can’t be true…）

The trembling is due to absolute dread.
Dread from the memories of the girl called Latifa.

In those memories, I recall numerous horrendous scenes of violence Latifa was subjected to. I can't help but tremble uncontrollably.
Apparently Latifa's existence is so thin that I'm able to completely take over her mind.
That's why I'm able to fully comprehend Latifa's dread.

(A dream, this must be a dream… This is a dream…)

I hide myself in the blanket trying to convince myself that this isn't reality.
However, no matter how long I hide in the blanket, I'm unable to wake up from this nightmare.
My body also won't stop trembling.
After a while, I hesitantly poke my head out of the blanket and take a look at my surroundings.
The dark room feels strangely familiar, it matches the one from my newly acquired memories. This is reality, the memories are proof of that.

Suddenly, the face of a boy two years my senior emerges from the memories. I've been ordered to call him Onii-sama.
He isn't an elder brother.
The elder brother I remember is a person like Onii-san[17].
Despite that, I can't get the image of the boy's warped smile when he tormented me out of my head.
The tools he uses to play with me are scattered around the room.
I can only describe them as strange, repulsive tools.

Creak
And then, the sound of a door opening resounds in the room.

「Hii!」

I unintentionally let out a cry.
Thinking back to it again, it was the worst thing I could've done.

「Nn? What? What is it? What do you want!?[18]」

The boy who just entered the room is my elder brother, Stead.
Seeing my reaction, he displays a curious expression for a moment before twisting his face in delight, almost as if he's on the verge of

jumping for joy.

「Hii! Ge— Get— Get away from me!」

I yell broken words as Stead vigorously approaches me.
I have difficulty talking because I haven't been taught how to speak properly. In no way is it because I'm a poor speaker.
Apart from Japanese, I can speak two other languages. My mother who taught me the language of my tribe passed away two years ago.
Therefore I was only able to partially learn two languages.

「Haha, what's the matter? Didn't you just bark nicely today!」
「O— Onii— Onii-sama…」

Onii-sama grins broadly as he brings his face next to mine.
He's the person forcing me to call him "Onii-sama".
Other than Onii-san, I absolutely loathe calling him that. However, I'm forced to comply to his orders because of the slave collar around my neck.
I can feel his disgusting excited breath on my skin, causing me to get goosebumps all over my body.
Suddenly, a warm sensation spreads around my crotch—

「Ha— Haha!!! Eh!? What is this!? You bitch! Did you piss yourself!?」

I seem to have soiled myself from extreme fear.
Onii-sama's words are angry but he's actually smiling.
I'm so scared I start crying and pleading.

「I— I'm sorry! Please… forgive me!」

I'm frantically begging for forgiveness.

「I wonder about that.」

Onii-sama comes over and begins to crudely touch my entire body.

「You know, I'm feeling really good right now. I'll give you a lot more love today.」

Onii-sama calls a servant and orders him to clean my room.
After that, he restricts my limbs and ties me facing upwards on the

bed.
I'm scared.
I'm deathly frightened and desperately want to struggle free. However, I'm unable to do anything since I'm forced to lie still by the collar.
The collar forcibly tampers with my mind; I feel terribly sick.

「It's too bad you smell like an animal since your face is so beautiful.」
「O— oniisama! Fo— Forgive me!」

No matter what I say, Onii-sama won't stop touching my body.
He's madly stroking my entire body.

「Oi oi. You won't piss yourself again? Didn't you just piss yourself not too long ago?」

I don't understand what he's talking about.
But, it's disgusting.
I'm getting goosebumps from hearing his wretched words.
Onii-sama's odour.
Is nauseating.
When mother was still alive, it resembles the smell that clung onto her after father summoned her.

「Fufufu, it might be a good idea to take your virginity once you're an adult.」

He continues caressing my body, claiming how he enjoys hearing my screams before leaving.
Maybe it's because he enjoyed my reaction today, but he continued to frequently come visit me for a while.
The days following the day I regained my memories, my reactions were excessively defiant. As the days passed, I notice that Onii-sama prefers this kind of reaction from me.
And so, I discover that by suppressing my mind, I'm also able to suppress my reactions.
As a result, the frequency of Onii-sama's visit has decreased.
However, he'd instead sometimes torment me with a whip under the pretence of discipline. His cruelty reached the point where he'd throw my meal on the floor and order me to lick it clean.

In addition, the frequency of combat training had increased recently by the orders of father.
Day after day, I'm drilled assassination techniques.
Thanks to being a Beastman, I possess greater physical prowess than the average human. Despite still being a child, my strength has already surpassed that of a human adult making me the ideal assassin.
I trained as instructed but also decided to devote myself to it.
Since Onii-sama won't visit me when I'm training.
Finally, I was ordered to kill my first target.

I was terrified when I was about to kill my first target. I initially felt reluctant but my body strangely moved on its own.
Maybe it's because of the collar?
That's what I thought at first, but I immediately noticed I was wrong.
Even though I cannot disobey orders, my emotions won't disappear.
Maybe, that was when my heart began to break.

Notes

1. TL : -_- ED2: The love that transcends worlds~ literally

2. TL : is she really a 4th grader?

3. TL : What are you doing Haruto? you're gonna leave such delicious MILF and LOLI alone???…… just a scream of my heart ED2: Smart man, adultery and paedophilia would land you in some hot water pretty fast.

4. TL: "Nice" is said in English

5. TL : Eh, is she really a NINE…correction, EIGHT years old GIRL?

6. TL : I wonder who she is…….? well, anyone will know as long as they read act 1 and 2, Ri-Haruto such a sinner ED2 : Wait, who is she? O.o TL : Mwahahaha, please read the previous act…… I mean older chapters

7. ED2: She's referring to the Onii-san from her original world.

8. ED2: Her speech is written in hiragana instead of kanji

Latifa Side Story

Part 2

I no longer recognise my own self.
Killing, murdering, every single one of them, I remembered the awful feeling of each assassination. I recalled the fear from each kill. However, I've now come to be able to calmly carry out my orders.
I learnt that this is the only way for me to survive in this world.

However, whenever I'm bounded facing upwards on the bed, I'd recall the first time I came to this world. It's enough to make me lose my mind.
I can endure the other things, but being bound is unbearable.
When Onii-sama noticed it, he made it a habit to torment me by binding me.

Occasionally, Onii-sama would treat me gently as if he had become a completely different person.
However, that guy will never become my Ani[1].
It is a fake kindness-desu.
Stead is just something I call Onii-sama.
My true Ani is Onii-san, not this person.
As long as I remember my present life's mom, my former life's parents, and Onii-san, my heart can never be truly broken.

「Aa~h, Princess Christina.」

Ever since a certain day, Onii-sama began repeating some other girls' names besides mine.
I often hear him calling the names Seria and Christina or something.
As if offering his chastity to them, he rarely caresses my body anymore.
But he still emits those disgusting odours.

Then one day, I wasn't sure what happened but Onii-sama was in a

terrible mood.
Onii-sama seemed to have made some kind of blunder at school and he took out his anger on me in the form of countless lashes[21].
Piecing together his disorderly outcries, he seemed to bear a grudge against a boy called Rio.
I've heard that name several times.
The boy was apparently on good terms with Seria and is said to be an immoral man who deceives girls. He's the reason I'm whipped so often.
What was this person even saying? He should look at what's coming out of his own mouth.
I just can't understand him.

Several days later, I'm summoned by father.
Whenever I receive a summon from father, it's for an assassination mission.
I prepare the necessary equipment and after donning my gear, head towards the room where father awaits.

「These are the clothes of the assassination target. Remember the smell.」

Father speaks to me in a voice devoid of emotion.

「Understood.」

I give a brief answer and memorise the scent on the clothes as ordered.
Somehow it feels nostalgic.
However, the rising feeling is immediately suppressed by the collar.

I leave the mansion and pursue the scent.
I start chasing the target as the owner of the smell seems to have gone outside of the capital.
On the way, I notice something odd.
The scent remains strong but I cannot find the target.
Despite running and running, I can't catch up to the target.
Only after two days am I able to catch up to the target.
Just how far is he going to run?
This is the first time I've ventured this far from the capital.

I confirm the target entering the bustling city thanks to my enhanced vision.
Surprisingly, the target is a black-haired male.
This is the first time I've seen someone with black hair in this world, so I'm abnormally curious.
Moreover he's around my age.
I want to speak to him but unfortunately, the collar around my neck won't let me do so.
My body will be assaulted with overwhelming pain if I defy orders.
Once, I tried going against an order; the pain that assaulted my body was enough to almost drive me mad.
I never want to experience it again.
It's disappointing but I decide to continue carrying out the assassination order.

Even if I wear a hood, there's a possibility of being discovered as beastman if I enter the city so I decide to wait for an opportunity on the outskirts of the city.
After waiting for a day, the target leaves the city.
I determine that this is a good chance and play dead.
The success or failure of an assassination is usually decided by the first blow.
It's common practice to lower the target's guard and quickly kill them.
It's natural for a person to approach a fallen person in the middle of the forest.
Therefore, I will stab him with a poison coated knife when he gets near.

As expected, the boy calls out to me and lifts me up to confirm whether I'm alive or not.
Even though I've had my mind set on killing him, when I see his face up close I hesitate for a moment.
His atmosphere, it resembles Onii-san's.
Is it because of the black hair?
No, there's resemblance there too but that's not all there is to it.
It's his eyes-desu.
His eyes and the eyes Onii-san had when he would listlessly stare out the bus window, I feel like they're identical.

However, the collar heartlessly reminds me of my duty and I swing my knife at the boy's side.

The boy reacts quickly and tries to evade the incoming knife but fails to avoid it due to how close we are.
Although the boy pushes away my body in a hurry, I'm convinced my mission is complete.
The knife is coated in a highly lethal poison and as a result, the effects can be seen immediately.
His face displays slight surprise when my hood falls off revealing my ears but as expected, his complexion worsens in an instant.
Yet, when the hand pressing against the wound briefly shines, his complexion becomes better again.

（W— Why…?）

I can't shake off my surprise as I jump at him to deliver the final blow.
Despite being stabbed by a poisonous blade, his movements are unexpectedly quick.
The poison doesn't seem to be affecting him at all.

（Ugh… Strong…）

Fighting against him for a while, I come to realise he's no push-over.
Judging from his outer appearance, he should be only slightly older than me but thanks to my beastman lineage, my physical prowess should greatly outstrip his.
Yet, he's able to keep up with my movements.
My strikes which have been forged through harsh training can't connect at all.
He parries all my attacks no matter how many times I slash at him.
My attacks cannot reach him.

（I— I can't win…）

Having pushed myself to the limits, it dawns me.
At this rate, I'll be killed.
I break into a cold sweat.
Even though I've killed countless people, I don't want to die.
Growing impatient, I thrust at him in desperation.

The next instant, I feel a sharp pain in my abdomen.
I'm nearly knocked unconscious.
However the impact against the ground forcibly pulls me back to reality.
Before I realise it, my limbs are restricted and I'm lying face up on my back. My mind blankens in fear.
This position is too much-desu.
I vividly recall the horrors of the first time I arrived in this world.

「Hii, hii, hiiuu, uuuuuuu, higuuuuu[3].」

I lose all reasoning and begin wailing in desperation.
The boy's saying something but it doesn't reach my ears.

I must've fallen unconscious during my struggle. The first thing I realise when I come to again is that my hands and feet are bound by ropes.
Before me is the boy, my target for assassination.
The collar is still ordering me to kill, the urge refuses to subside.
Even though I want to somehow kill him and escape, it's impossible given my current situation.

And then, the boy begins questioning me in a way similar to those in TV dramas I watched in my former life.
I keep silent. I'm afraid he'll see through my lies if I open my mouth.
I keep my mouth shut until—

「…Do you want to be released from slavery?」

With a difficult expression, he asks that alluring question.

Despite having already discarded most of my emotions, my body can't help but tremble at his words.
It's obvious-desu.
What I would give for such a thing to come true.
I want to meet those dear to me again.
Amidst the pain and suffering, I still clung onto that desire.
However, as a slave, I had no choice but to live as someone's pet. I had almost given up hope.
That's why, those words tugged at my heart.

「Of course.」

The boy seems to have understood my thoughts from my reaction.
However, I continue watching the boy, trying to understand his real intentions.

（I… can be released from slavery?）

I embrace the faint hope sprouting from within me again.
My heart can't help but beat rapidly.
The boy once again asks me if I wish to be released from slavery.
He also asks if I'll try to kill him again after being released. Of course not, I'd never do such a thing if freed.
The manifestation of my killing intent is only because of the collar around my neck.

（But… it's not a trap setup by them[141], right?）

Could it be that Onii-sama's lurking nearby? Are they going to pretend to grant me salvation only to snatch it away at the very last moment? My eyes dart at my surroundings, looking to see if there's anything suspicious nearby.
However, the only people I can sense here are myself and the boy in front of me.
I steel myself and timidly nod. The boy extends a warm hand and touches the collar.
KAN With a high pitch sound, the collar falls off.
I stare at the fallen collar in awe.
I frantically move my neck to ascertain the sensation of the collar. (She's still tied up)
However, the collar that had been restraining me for all these years can't be felt.

「Ah… hic, hic, hiku, hiku, ueeeeeeeeen!」

Like water flowing from a broken faucet, I burst into tears.
The tears just won't stop.
In the first place, I don't even know why I'm crying.
But then I realize, it's because I'm overwhelmed with joy.
I finally notice it, the feeling I haven't experienced in so long, happiness. Upon this realization, I cry even more.

I don’t remember how long I cried for.
Gradually, my crying subsides——

「Are you okay now?」

The boy calls out to me.
Twitch My body trembles.
I completely forgot the boy is still here.
I’m happy, but I don’t know what I should say to him. In the state of confusion, I continue staring at him.

「I’ve removed the poison so you can have your knife back. You should escape quickly.」

Having said that, the boy returns my knife.
He cuts the ropes binding me and treats my abdomen where I received his attack earlier[5].

「Eh…?」

Realizing my current state, I let out a stupid voice.
I can run.
I can escape.
But to where?
It’s terribly embarrassing because even if he tells me to escape, I don’t know what to do.

「Like I said, you can escape. It’ll be difficult for you to live in human territory but to the east you can find beastmen territory. I’m also heading east, but unfortunately my clothes are torn. I’ll be heading back to town now to replace my clothes so this is where we’ll part. Farewell.」

The boy tells me my options while I was still in a daze.
East…
Which way is east?
I’ve been chasing after his scent without taking note of any directions.

（Since he said he’s also heading east… is it in the opposite direction of the capital?）

While I'm standing here in confusion, the boy has already headed back to the town.

（Ah, he's gone…）

I stare at the boy's retreating figure in a daze.
I wander around the area for while.

Where should I go?
The mansion in the royal capital?
No.
Definitely not.
I will never return to that place!
It's just… I don't know of any other places but there.

（Does my tribe reside in the east?）

My mother was the only person who treated me kindly in this world.
Will those of my mother's tribe also treat me kindly?
Such hope begins to grow within me.
However, I'm afraid of venturing eastward without knowing exactly where to go.
What should I do?
While I'm still mulling over what to do, I notice the boy from before is heading back towards me. Panicking, I hide myself in a hurry.

（I— I'm going to tail him…）

As I watch his figure moving past the place where we fought, I end up following him from a distance.
Although he's moving swiftly, I'm somehow able to keep up.
A while after I start following him, all of a sudden, the boy stops and ——

「…Come out.」

There is a hint of annoyance in his words.
TWITCH My body jumps.
How? I should have erased my presence.
As I'm wondering how he noticed me, I realise I really can't win against him.
I mean, I was discovered so easily.

I timidly reveal myself before him.

「Why are you following me?」

Asks the boy.

「A— Ano… east… go… together…」

What are you saying, me!?
I'm able to manipulate my heart to the extent of even fooling the collar and yet, I just came out and asked the person I was trying to kill not too long ago to travel together. There's no way he'll agree.
However, I have an inclination that this boy possesses a similar disposition to Onii-san, so maybe, just maybe he'll agree to my selfish request.
Just like how I was at a loss before, maybe he'll lend me a hand again.
I embrace the faint hope in my heart.
The boy is hesitating whether to take me along or not, so I decide to gather my courage and convey my resolve to travel together with him.

「…Let's go, desu.」

Back then, if it was the current me, would I have been able to call out to Onii-san?
Such a thought surfaces in my mind.

「I'm a human you know. We're a selfish existence. Am I not the same as the ones who enslaved you?」

The boy rejects my suggestion in a troubled tone.

「Unpleasant feeling… not there, desu. Strange smell[161], also don't have.」

But I can no longer back down after having made it this far.
I can't imagine that this boy would treat me like how Stead and father did.
I mean, he doesn't have that strange smell Stead had when he got excited torturing me.
Furthermore, he doesn't carry a tense atmosphere.

How do I say it? It's as if a gentle aura surrounds him.
It closely resembles that of Onii-san's.

「Besides, I can't bring you into beastmen territory.」

Although he seems to be reluctant about entering beastmen territory,
I tell him I'm fine with it even if it's only up until the border.
And so, he grants my selfish wish.
Suddenly, within my mind an absurd possibility arises, could it be that this boy is Onii-san reincarnated?
There's no way that's possible.
I only thought of such a ridiculous idea because of his kindness.

「Wait here for a bit. I'm going back to the city to buy a few necessities for you. Let's see, I'll be back in about an hour. Alright?」

For some reason, it seems that the boy is going to buy some necessities for me.
I softly nod as he begins heading back to the city.

「Oh yeah, what's your name?」

The boy suddenly stops and asks for my name.

「Latifa.」

I give the name given to me by my mother of this world.
It is my precious memento.

「I see. I'm Rio. Nice to meet you, Latifa.」

The boy also introduces himself.
His name is Rio-desu.
I wonder how I should call him.
Rio, Rio-kun, Rio-san.
Is it alright to call him Rio-san?.
Rio… Onii-chan.
That way of calling him suddenly pops into my head.

Onii-san is reserved solely for one person.
However, the kindness felt from this boy resembles that of Onii-san's.

So, I think I shall call him Onii-chan.
While gazing at Rio’s retreating figure, I think so to myself.

Notes

1. Elder brother

2. ED1: anyone else vote to kill off this fake ani (preferably by summoning truck-san)? TL : I’m with you buddy, let’s torture him first PF: wouldn’t hitting him with a truck give him a chance of reincarnation and become OP?

3. She is crying, just for your information

4. Refers to shitty pair of father and son

5. ED2: She cried for all that time while still tied up? Rio needs to learn how to treat women better TL : He already built a harem if he can do that]

6. It was called estrus smell in Mushoku Tensei, and Rudy got owned so many times by the beast race because of that

Latifa Side Story

Part 3

When Rio-san returned from the city, we start heading towards the east.
I use magic to raise my physical abilities but Rio-san seems to strengthen his body using something called Spirit Arts.
I'm told that unlike humans, demi-humans, including those of my tribe, use Spirit Arts instead of magic contracts.
Then why is Rio-san, a human, able to use it?
Well whatever, it's not really important anyway.
Yup, Rio-san is just Rio-san.

Rio-san says my magical power can be used in a variety of ways.
It is be said that magical power is an energy originating from one's body.
I don't really get it but apparently like stamina, it'll recover with enough rest.
I often think I'm about to run out of magical power but I've never truly depleted it before.
Even though I'd feel a sudden decrease of magical power in my body whenever I use magic to enhance my physical abilities, there's always more whenever I need it.

Rio-san's physical abilities are normally inferior to mine, but when factoring in magic, I lose out to him who's using Spirit Arts.
Furthermore, he has a considerable amount of stamina.
My training has also provided me with a great amount of stamina but when comparing who can run for longer periods of time, an obvious difference can be noticed between Rio-san and I who was confined to a room.
As such, I'm quickly approaching my limit during our run.
I've run out of breath and can no longer keep up with Rio-san.
Surprisingly, he notices it and suggests that we take a break.

Rio-san is truly a kind person.
He's just like Onii-san.
I will call him Onii-chan.
I wonder if he'll get angry being called that.
He notices my unease and silence and makes small talk from time to time to alleviate my tension, it really reminds me of Onii-san.
I become lost in thought and my pace falls even further.
Just like Onii-san, Rio-san notices my slower pace.
And offers to help me.
As I'm comparing Rio-san to Onii-san, Rio-san slows down and stops.
Look, as expected.
He approaches me and offers me water.
I drink it with vigor.
Aa~h, delicious.

All of a sudden, my stomach emits a rumbling sound.
All I could think was "Oh no, this is bad". I instinctively shake my head to deny my stomach's appetite.
Nothing good ever came out of having my stomach resound in front of Stead.
Before every meal, I was required to perform a routine before him.
I was forced to carry out whatever he demanded in order to be allowed a shabby meal.
Hence I've become conditioned to deny myself whenever my stomach rings out.
Yet, Rio-san only gives a slight chuckle—

「It's already time for lunch huh? …Here.」

Saying that, I'm offered a delicious looking sandwich stuffed with ingredients.
This is the first time I've seen such an appetizing sandwich since coming to this world.
Am I really allowed to eat this?
My eyes dart between Rio-san and the sandwich multiple times.

「What's wrong?」

He asks me with a face full of curiosity.

「I'm… allowed… to eat?」

If it's Rio-san, perhaps I'm allowed to eat, but I'm scared, I'm scared to eat with explicitly being given permission.
Such behaviour has already become ingrained in my mind.

「No need to hold yourself back. You can eat it.」

Aah, as I thought, Rio is truly kind.

「Hic, hichic, 'ic, hic, hiic.」

I start out chewing the sandwich but before long start shoving it into my mouth.
It is truly terrible manners.
But to have such a feast before my eyes, there's no way I can restrain myself, there's no way I can endure waiting any longer. The unimaginably delicious sandwich causes various emotions of mine to surface and I start to cry.
Before I realise it, Rio-san is softly patting my back.

I'm afraid of becoming completely dependent on Rio-san.
Yet I want to make Rio-san mine.
Still, I know it's unrealistic to completely depend on him because he told me we will part ways upon arrival of beastmen territory.
Nevertheless, I can't help but have such thoughts.

Suddenly a thought surfaces from within me, to what extent will Rio-san tolerate my selfishness?
Is it selfish to say that we'll always be together?
How 'bout that?
I want to try it.
But wouldn't it be more effective if I wait until we've become a bit closer?
To imagine such a thing—
Aah, what a deceitful child I am.
Indeed, these are the kinds of thoughts currently going through my head.
Could it be that this world is slowly twisting me into a deceitful person[11]?
Nevertheless, the gentleness and affection displayed by Rio-san

strongly resembles my mother. It's difficult for me not to want to indulge in his kindness.

Afterwards, we continue running for a while and as the sun begins to set, we set up camp outside.
With experienced movements, Rio-san prepares a tent using only leaves and branches from the surrounding trees.
Amazing-desu.
Following that, he tells me to wait inside the tent a bit while he prepares dinner.
A short while later, an irresistible aroma wafts into the tent tickling my nose. I unconsciously follow the scent and emerge from the tent.
My current nose is infinitely more sensitive than my former life's nose.
While my nose is twitching to the vagrant aroma, I follow the smell and end up where Rio-san is.

（Uuu~, he's laughing at me…）

Rio-san notices me and starts laughing lightly. I can feel my face burning up as I hang my head in shame.
Still, the scent is much too enticing and I end up approaching him anyway.

「Look, it's soup pasta. The seasoning is an original blend though.」

Having said that, Rio-san passes over a bowl and fork to me.
Upon seeing the contents, I'm shocked.

「…『Spaghetti』? This, isn't this『Spaghetti』!?」

I unintentionally raise my voice as I ask Rio-san.

「Ah, yeah… Please eat up.」

Rio-san seems a bit taken aback. Possibly because I raised my voice?
Oh well, that doesn't matter. I don't have time to think about that right now.
I mean, this is spaghetti-desu.
It's one of my favourite dishes Okaa-san[12] used to make for me in

my past life.
Aa~h, how I miss eating with a fork.
I fiercely blow on the piping hot spaghetti to cool it down.
The moment the spaghetti enters my mouth, an incomparable taste hinting of salt and spices permeates my mouth.

「Hafu, hafu hafuu~」

I vigourously wolf down the spaghetti while enduring the scalding heat inside my mouth.
As suggested by Rio-san, I dip a bread-like biscuit into the soup and eat it, resulting in a different but still superb flavour.
The way it flawlessly compliments the soup reminds me of Okaa-san's home cooking.
Being reminded of Okaa-san and Otou-san, I begin to cry.
Despite uncontrollably sobbing, I still manage to clean my plate and before I notice, have drained the last of my soup.

（Ah, it's empty…）

I inadvertently start licking the bowl.
Compared to my previous life, my manners have taken a nosedive.
Unable to watch my miserable conduct any longer, Rio-san gives me another serving.
My eyes immediately brighten and I give a slight bow before digging into the spaghetti again.
After we finished eating, I return to the tent and wipe down my body before immediately falling asleep due to the fatigue I accumulated over the day.

But, there's a problem.
Even though it's shameful for someone my age, I often cry at night.
The memories of my mother, my parents of my previous life, Onii-san, if I recall any of them I will surely cry at night.
In the extreme case, I'll even start wailing and howling.
Lo and behold, I end up crying like a baby tonight.
Moreover, it's quite fierce too.
Whenever I start crying, I'd immediately wake up in a disorderly and frightened state.
However, this time when I wake up, I forget that I was just crying

because Rio-san is sleeping beside me.
Of course, Rio-san immediately woke up when I started crying.
And then, he gently wraps his arms around me.

(Ah…)

My crying instantly subsides.
It is at this moment that I feel the warmth of the people dear to me.
Even though I've just met Rio-san, he's hugging me tightly.
He nuzzles against my face as I cry. Soon after, I fall asleep again without crying anymore.
Waking up the next morning, I find myself clinging to Rio-san.
Rio-san seems to have woken up before me but because I was clinging onto to him so tightly while I slept, he couldn't get up without waking me up.
In contrast to my flushed red face, Rio-san is—

「Good morning.」

He greets me with a wry smile.
That face is a spitting image of a certain Onii-san in my memories.
That's why, from this day onwards, I decide to call him Onii-chan.
Onii-chan didn't say anything as I cried last night, he only held me gently.
That alone made me very happy.

Why is this person so kind to me?
That question surfaces in my mind all of a sudden.
Even though I came with the intent to kill him…
However, the affection I'm feeling from him seems to be genuine.
Why is that?
Is it because he's Onii-chan?
Aa~h, that must be why[131].
For some reason, that thought makes my heart skip a beat.
So I can act spoiled before him right?
Thinking that, I decide that starting from today, I will openly act spoiled in front of Onii-chan[141].

Just like that, several days have passed. During those days I talked to Onii-chan a lot and yet, I couldn't find the courage to call him Onii-

chan.
Onii-chan listened to all my requests and even when I cried and kicked up a fuss at night, he would soothe me without so much as a complaint.
Therefore, I'm convinced that this person is my Onii-chan after all.
Compared to before, I cry a lot less at night now.
I think it's thanks to feeling Onii-chan's warmth.
One night, as I'm crying and being embraced by Onii-chan like usual, I unintentionally—

「O…Nii…Chan.」

I said it.
That was the moment when the name I carried in my heart became a reality.
I was half asleep at the time but the memories of that remained when I woke up the next morning.
My face was probably bright red when I remembered it.
However, now that I've said it once, I can no longer keep the feelings bottled up inside me.

「Onii-chan!」

Now, I always call him Onii-chan.
To the deeply blushing me, Onii-chan comes over and asks what's wrong but—

「I mean, since Onii-chan's Onii-chan after all…」

As I say that, I smile wryly to myself as I've come to an understanding.
I understand that Onii-chan's existence is growing bigger and bigger in my heart.
On the other hand, as we progress on our journey, I continue to dread the moment when we will have to bid farewell.
Onii-chan had said that he will only accompany me up until we reach the place where my tribe lives.
But, I don't want that.
I'd much rather stay with Onii-chan than to live with complete strangers, even if they are from the same race as me.
I know I'm being selfish.

But, I can't bear to part with Onii-chan's warmth anymore.

I stick closely to Onii-chan day and night.
When he's preparing meals, when we eat, even when we sleep, I always stick to him[15].
After all, unless I'm hugging Onii-chan at night, I'll end up crying.
Even if he says no, I want to be with him regardless of whether he's changing or using the toilet[16].
I want him to see every part of me; I want him to know everything about me.
I don't mind offering my body and soul if it's Onii-chan.

Then one day as I'm daydreaming about those kinds of thoughts as usual, we spot an abnormally large tree in the distance.
I don't know whether Tokyo Tower from my previous life or the tree is taller.
We decide to travel in the direction of the tree.
Then I notice a peculiar smell.
I can't explain it in words, but the smell is unlike that of an animal or monster.
When I try but fail to describe the smell to Onii-chan—

「I see. This is probably a good time… shall we stop here for the day?」

We decide to set up camp here for today.
As usual, dinner made by Onii-chan is delicious.
Today's dinner is Risotto-desu.
It's a bit different from rice gruel, but it's really delicious regardless-desu.
After finishing our meal, we head back into the tent, and I fall into a deep sleep while clinging onto Onii-chan.

How long did I sleep for?
During my sleep, I notice that Onii-chan's warmth is missing and after a while, begin to cry.
My eyes suddenly open and what comes into view is an unfamiliar room.
By my side is a little girl, probably around my age, as well as a slightly older woman with beautiful looking wings.

But, I can't find Onii-chan.
He's not here.
Onii-chan isn't here.
When I realise that, I begin crying loudly.
The two girls seem to be speaking to me in the language my mother taught me, but I don't know how to repond.

「Where's Onii-chan?」

I don't remember how many times I shouted that but my throat is becoming sore.
All of a sudden, I catch a whiff of Onii-chan's scent.
There's no doubt about it.
There's no mistaking it.
I make a mad dash towards where Onii-chan is.

（Don't go! Onii-chan!）

Is Onii-chan going to leave me without so much as a good-bye?
Is it because we've arrived at the place where my tribe lives?
I don't want that.
I absolutely don't want that.
Fearing separation from Onii-chan, I become desperate.
The inside of the building is spacious, but thanks to my sense of smell I don't lose my way.

Before long, I find the room where Onii-chan is in and I dive through the open door.
There.
There he is.
Onii-chan.
Relief spreads throughout my body as I embrace Onii-chan.
Multiple people then enter the room one after another.
Shortly after, an Obaa-chan with fox ears like mine also enters and the girls in the room start explaining the situation[171].
I don't understand exactly everything they're saying but I get the gist of it.

（They're the ones who did this to Onii-chan!）

The moment it dawns me, I direct bloodthirst towards them.

Oniichan’s enemies are my enemies.
The girls react to my bloodthirst and raise their guards. Although I’m barely able to restrain myself from attacking, I realise I’m at a major numerical disadvantage.
Just as I start planning on how to escape from here with Onii-chan—

「I’m sorry. For the time being, I’d like to hear your circumstances. I also apologize for the way he was treated. First, untie him. Is that enough for you?」

The fox eared Obaa-chan speaks while approaching me.
This Obaa-chan is of the same race as my mother and I.
Can I trust what she says?
Onii-chan told me they were gentle people.
But, I’m finding it difficult to believe his words from the current situation. Still, it was Onii-chan who said it.
So I’ll give them the benefit of the doubt.

「…If that’s the case then hurry up. Try anything funny and I’ll kill you.」

When I told them that, the fox eared Obaa-chan orders a cute girl to remove Onii-chan’s restraints.
The winged woman in the back starts to protest but the fox eared Obaa-chan rebukes her instead.
The shackles restraining Onii-chan come off the moment the cute long eared girl places her hand over them.

「Latifa, I’m okay now so retract your bloodthirst.」

I withdraw my bloodthirst as Onii-chan calms me down in a gentle voice. Although I’m relieved, I’m still wary of the other party.
I’m still not convinced they’re trustworthy but Onii-chan pats me on the head to reassure me.
Afterwards, Onii-chan’s injuries are treated and we move to another room to talk.

The contents of the discussion went way over my head so I end up dozing off halfway through. By the time I wake up again, I notice Onii-chan sleeping beside me.
I happily hug Onii-chan and fall asleep once more.

Upon opening my eyes the next time, Onii-chan and I had lunch together.
Shortly afterwards, three girls who joined us not too long ago and had been talking with Onii-chan turn over to me and introduce themselves.
They're the ones who were mean to Onii-chan before so I try avoiding them but thanks to Onii-chan mediating between us, I'm gradually able to talk with them.
They don't seem to be bad children.
Talking with the girls close to my age is refreshing. I feel a bit awkward, but before I knew it, I'm already getting along with them.

As evening approaches, Onii-chan leaves me, saying that he has to go meet some important people.
I feel really anxious but I decide to wait for Onii-chan and because he told me everything will be fine, I'll believe him.
Being left behind, I talk with the three girls from before again and learn that this place is called the village of Seirei no Tami.
The girls are Sara-onee-chan of the Silver Wolf Tribe, Oufia-onee-chan of the High Elf Tribe, and Alma-onee-chan of the Elder Dwarf Tribe; they're all older than me.

When Onii-chan returns a while later, a small banquet is held and both Onii-chan and I attend.
I don't know the full story but it seems like Onii-chan will be staying in the village for while.
In short, I can stay together with Onii-chan a while longer.
The news makes me so happy that I completely forget about the fear of being separated from Onii-chan and I start to actually enjoy the banquet.

Notes

1. TL : No, you were clearly already one before reincarnation

2. ED: "Okaa-san" refers to her previous life's mom while "mother" refers to her current life's mom

3. ED: That explains nothing…

4. TL : Scary, Latifa is truly a scary girl; PR: Definetly, all she needs now is a white cat; TL : why she need a white cat?

5. TL : scary, Latifa is scary…….; PR: She was already a stalker in her previous life, now she's being clingy; TL : she and one more girl actually

6. ED: Wtf

7. TL : Arthura gender confirmed!!!; PR: I felt it was obvious from the previous chapters

Latifa Side Story

Part 4

My life in the Seirei no Tami village began a few days ago.
Onii-chan seems to be studying Spirit Arts or something from the Obaa-chan called Arthura.

Meanwhile, I'm stuck being taught about the Seirei no Tami by Sara-Onee-chan and the other Onee-chans.
Although the amount of time I can be with Onii-chan has decreased, it's apparently for my sake.
I will obey if it's Onii-chan's wish.
I've obeyed all of Onii-chan's instructions thus far and he's never been wrong.
Still, studying from dawn to dusk every day is quite boring.
Aah, I want to spend more time with Onii-chan.

「Nee~ Sara-Onee-chan. Can I go see Onii-chan?」

My thoughts unintentionally leak out from my mouth.

「You cannot-desu. We're going to teach Latifa our language now.」

Sara-Onee-chan cuts down my request in a single stroke.
Muu~ so mean.
While kind, Sara-Onee-chan is also quite strict.
The way she scolded me just now was like a Spartan instructor.
Since it can't be helped, I'll endure it a little longer.
I'll get to sleep with Onii-chan tonight anyway.
Currently, I sleep together with Onii-chan in his room.
Sara-Onee-chan and the other Onee-chans were hesitant to allow Onii-chan and I, who are of opposing sexes and of the same age group, to sleep together, but they relented after I stubbornly refused to sleep in a different room.
I managed to obtain permission from Arthura-san. Thanks to her

influence within the village, it put a stop to the objections.

「First off, spirits are—」

It's currently Alma-Onee-chan's turn to teach me.
Alma-Onee-chan's lessons are about spirits.
Her explanations are incredibly easy to understand-desu.
If I had to point out a fault, I guess that the content is too trivial?
Listening to her lectures makes me sleepy.
Too bad Sara-Onee-chan will get angry if I sleep.

As expected of the Seirei no Tami, they regard spirits as special existences.
Spirits are an existence who govern nature. To the Seirei no Tami, spirits are revered as Gods.
However, unlike the Gods back on Earth, spirits actually exist.
Although most spirits stay in their spiritual forms and don't appear in front of others, a few do materialize themselves before the public.
Moreover, some spirits even lend their powers to us.
In particular, spirits that come into contact with individuals and offer to lend them their power are referred to as contracted spirits. Those who have spirit contracts are few in number and are highly regarded within the Seirei no Tami.
Spirits have the ability to read an individual's heart and will only form a contract with one who possesses a pure heart and soul.

Sara-Onee-chan and the two other Onee-chans all have contracted spirits.
For the most part, they stay asleep within the Onee-chans' bodies in their spiritual forms but will show themselves on special occasions.
Although the spirits take the form of common animals, I was fascinated and unintentionally stood there admiring them for a while when I saw them.
Sara-Onee-chan's spirit takes the form of a wolf, Oufia-Onee-chan's an eagle, and Alma-Onee-chan's a raccoon.
Each were medium-ranked spirits but even then, they're considered to reside at the pinnacle of contracted spirits.
Spirits are divided into ranks from low to high with the highest currently confirmed spirit being a Quasi-high ranked spirit; high-ranked spirits assume a role akin to overseers.

The Onee-chans' spirits aren't able to speak but spirits ranked quasi-high and above can.

Yet, even if they can't speak, they can still perceive my heart right…?
In other words, the spirits are fully aware of the feelings I harbour towards Onii-chan.
When I think about, spirits are actually quite fearsome.
Un, perhaps I should also familiarize myself with the Seirei no Tami.

Respect the spirits, cherish your peers, exercise restraint, and show modesty.
The Seirei no Tami is made up of a gathering of such people.
In particular, failing to exercise restraint and succumbing to avarice is the most heinous crime among the Seirei no Tami.

As such, Sara-Onee-chan taught me to practice restraint as I am also part of the Seirei no Tami.
However, I just can't control myself when it comes to Onii-chan.
I wonder if my feelings as Latifa are different than my feelings as Suzune.
My outward appearance is of a beastman but my heart is that of a human and a beastman.
This is a secret I carry that nobody is aware of.
I've never told anybody about it.
That's right, not even Onii-chan knows that I was once a Japanese person.
I mean, anyone would think I'm touched in the head if they heard my story right?
While it's true that I want Onii-chan to know everything about me, I'm afraid of whether or not he'll accept my story.
Still, one day, one day I want to tell Onii-chan.
Must I restrain this uneasiness too?
I no longer understand.
So, I decide to ask Oufia-Onee-chan about exercising restraint.

「Certainly we, the Seirei no Tami, highly value self-restraint, but it doesn't mean we're completely selfless.」

Exercising restraint does not mean that one must endure every kind

of desire, it's just to the point of regulating one's self to avoid unnecessary conflict with others.
We eat when hungry.
Sleep when sleepy.
Such desires are normal because we're alive.
However, one must not bring about conflict in pursuit of one's desires.
Rather than profit, both parties will only suffer as a result.
For that reason, there is never be a good reason to create conflict since it is useless.
Therefore to oppose one's desires, one must exercise restraint.
The adults allow children in the village to act in accordance with their desires in the beginning.
However, sooner or later, a quarrel will break out among the children.
At that time, the adults will teach the children the meaning of restraint.
Those who are unable to show restraint and consistently gets into fights with others are treated like children and will never be given a meaningful role in the village.
When one is able to grasp the importance of restraint, they will come to respect their peers. It is at this point that they will finally be acknowledged as a full-fledged member of the Seirei no Tami.
Lacking self-restraint, the human race had caused irreparable in the past.
As a result, there are many anecdotes circulating the village about the human race succumbing to desire.

But I wonder how true that is.
I mean, I certainly believe that humans lack restraint.
The humans who treated me as a slave don't have any sort of restraint.
However, I believe there are humans who exercise restraint.
I mean, just look at Onii-chan, he's practically a lump of self-restraint.
I can't even imagine Onii-chan losing himself to self-interest and harming someone.

「Of course it can't be applied to the human race as a whole. Even I

think that Rio-sama is an amazing person.」

I stare hard at Oufia-Onee-chan.
Could it be that she has also fallen for Onii-chan?
No, it doesn't seem like that for the moment.
The Seirei no Tami deeply respect those who display a great amount of restraint.
Oufia-Onee-chan was only praising Onii-chan on those grounds.
How should I say it? Oufia-Onee-chan seems to be a natural airhead, though I may be wrong.
I feel like that allows her to carry a tolerant and gentle atmosphere similar to mother.
Of course that doesn't mean Sara-Onee-chan and Alma-Onee-chan aren't kind to me. It's just that there's a gap between them and the warm and fuzzy Oufia-Onee-chan.

Apart from that, I think to myself that if it comes to my love for Onii-chan, I don't have the patience to exert self-restraint.
That's right, at this time, I still don't take Onii-chan's feelings into account.
It's thanks to Onii-chan's assistance that I'm able to become slightly more aware of this from the talk earlier. However, Onii-chan is Onii-chan, that is something I'm sure I have not mistaken.

While continuing to learn various things from the Onee-chans, over half a year passes in the blink of an eye.
Onii-chan studied a wide variety of things under the village Elders. Although we seldom meet during the day, we have plenty of time to share our stories come nighttime.

We're currently living in Arthura-san's house.
Arthura-san lives with her daughter and son-in-law. Apparently her granddaughter has passed away.
I wonder if it's because I'm also part of the fox tribe that Arthura-san showers me with so much affectionate.
Recently, I've even slept with Arthura-san instead of Onii-chan.
I'm reminded of the time I stayed over at Ojii-san and Obaa-san's house in my previous life. It makes me feel a little nervous.
Aah, I'm truly glad I came to this village.
It's exactly like what Onii-chan said.

One day, I received a day off since all the Onee-chans were busy.

「Ah, Latifa-chan nano-desu!」

I didn't mean to but when I was wandering around the village trying to find Onii-chan, a girl around my age called out to me.
She was a girl from the wolf tribe and Sara-Onee-chan's little sister, Bella-chan.

「Hey, Latifa, come play.」

And then, a boy from the lion tribe called Arslan came and spoke to me too.
They're friends I made in this village as well as classmates.
That's right, I'm not the only one taking classes in the village.
The responsibility of teaching children in the village falls upon other children who excel at their studies and are slightly older than those being taught.
By having a teacher close in age, lessons can be absorbed easier.
The Onee-chans who teach many of the village's children are the village elders' children and are incredibly smart.
Although I've been studying alone in the past, I've finally been allowed to partake in normal classes not too long ago and seamlessly mixed in with the class.
Thus I successfully made a lot of friends.
Arslan-kun is something like the leader of the class.
Unlike her somewhat straight-laced older sister Sara-Onee-chan, Bella-chan has a much more innocent and childlike personality.
Both of them are very proactive towards me and we get along very well; they're good kids.

「I'm sorry but I'm going to see Onii-chan now.」

I want to go play with them but today is a rare chance for me to meet Onii-chan during the day.
That's why I had to turn down Arslan-kun's invitation.

「Eeh… Onii-chan's that human guy right…?」

Arslan-kun has an annoyed expression as he spoke.

「That's right. Is there a problem?」

My tone may have come out a little harsh.
Infighting among the human race as well as repeated aggression against us has resulted in a strong sense of distrust against humans among the Seirei no Tami.
Even the older generation who are more open-minded still harbour distrust much less the younger generation who are easily influenced.
Sara-Onee-chan and the two other Onee-chans don't seem to be prejudiced towards Onii-chan but they're the rare exception.
That's why, although the majority of the villages knows about Onii-chan living in the village, everybody goes out of their way to avoid contact with him.
I have also been subjected to slavery by the hands of humans and similar incidents have been reported in the past, so I can understand why they carry suspicions.
But I really wish they'd stop directing such suspicions at Onii-chan.

「No, then come play with us afterwards. Today's our long-awaited day off after all.」

Arslan's words seem to carry a hint of concern.

「U~n. Then, I'll go see Onii-chan now. If he's busy then I'll return right away and then we can play, okay?」

I decide to propose a compromise.

「U~n, that's good! Come back quickly, we'll be in the plaza.」

Arslan-kun agrees to my proposal.
He runs towards the plaza together with Bella-chan.
This is acceptable for now but I hope one day, Onii-chan will be accepted by the people of the Seirei no Tami.
I'm confident that once they get to know Onii-chan, everybody will understand that he's not a bad person.
If that happens, then Onii-chan can stay in the village forever.
Will Onii-chan eventually leave the village?
My chest tightens whenever I think about it.
So that Onii-chan can stay in the village forever, is there a way to get Onii-chan accepted by everyone?

…That's it!

Maybe everybody will change their minds once they have a taste of Onii-chan's cooking.
Every single dish created by Onii-chan is delicious after all.
The food in the village is good too, but Onii-chan's cooking is completely foreign.
After we started living in Arthura-san's house, Onii-chan's cooking became extremely popular within the household.
Now, why don't I have everyone try Onii-chan's cooking?
Isn't that a great idea?

I've hit upon a really good idea. First, I'll have those close to me eat Onii-chan's cooking.
After that, with Arthura-san's permission, I'll invite the Onee-chans over to Arthura's house.
Let's call over Uzuma-san too.
Uzuma-san seemed to be wary of Onii-chan but ever since sparring against him the other day, she suddenly came to respect Onii-chan.
Despite still quite young, Uzuma-san is a brilliant warrior leading one of the warrior groups in the village.
She's an honest and gentle person, though a little clumsy at times.
If it's Uzuma-san, I think she'll become a strong supporter for Onii-chan.
To get Onii-chan to cook one of his dishes, I'll make a selfish request to make it seem like I want to eat his cooking.

In accordance with my plan, the Onee-chans come over by "chance" when Onii-chan is still cooking.
We're sitting down on the sofa and chatting when Onii-chan comes and fills the table with various dishes.
Everyone's eyes are glued to the dishes.
Fufufu, it's still too early to be surprised.
Onii-chan's cooking doesn't only look appetizing, it also tastes absolutely amazing.
Sure enough, when the Onee-chans eat Onii-chan's cooking, they all give high praises.
That's only natural.
Onii-chan heeded my request as in front of me are a wide variety of enticing dishes reproduced from my previous life.
The flavour of these dishes have been developed over the course of

human history so there's no way they can't be delicious.
Besides, these are all made by Onii-chan-desu.

Afterwards, I keep inviting everyone back on a weekly basis to have them enraptured by Onii-chan's cooking. Slowly but surely, I'm dragging all of them into my "Onii-chan faction[11]".
When the time is right, I'll propose to have Onii-chan hold a cooking class.
I've already laid the groundwork to have the village elders' daughters attend.
After I tell Onii-chan about it, the cooking class can be held immediately.
Thus, Onii-chan easily consented to holding a cooking class.
Before anybody could react, Arthura-san quickly made the necessary preparations and Onii-chan's cooking class was ready to be held.

Although the first class is limited to only the wives and daughters of the village elders, the number of people in attendance is overwhelming.
It seems the first recipe to be unveiled will be omelette rice-desu.
Onii-chan's omelette rice uses half-fried eggs like those served in Western style restaurants.
I'm sure it'll suit everyone's taste.

When the class begins, everybody listens attentively to Onii-chan's explanation.
At first, the women are impressed at how skillful Onii-chan handles a knife.
Afterwards, they are drawn in by the sweet fragrance of the unknown recipe.
Finally, "Mission Complete[12]" as they eat the completed omelette rice.
Although each person is only allowed one spoonful, it seems to be a success since everyone is reminiscing on the taste.
As we start making the dish ourselves, Onii-chan is bombarded with questions on how to accurately replicate the outstanding flavour.
The figure of Onii-chan politely answering everyone's questions will hopefully leave a good impression.

「Latifa-chan's Onii-sama is amazing-nodesu!」

Sitting beside me, Bella-chan is admiring Onii-chan with sparkling eyes.
After we finish making our omelette rice, I quickly catch the fleeing Onii-chan and drag him over to our table.

「Ehehe, Bella-chan also says that Onii-chan's cooking is delicious right?」

When I say that to Bella-chan who's happily eating the omelette rice, she responds with a beaming smile on her face.
Looking around, I see that the other girls are also interested in Onii-chan. There also seems to be a considerable amount of talk about how Onii-chan may have a spirit contract.
It's big news because having a spirit contract is proof that a person possesses a pure heart.
It was also interesting when Anya-san told us what kind of impression Sara-Onee-chan and the other Onee-chans had towards Onii-chan.

「Mother made a dish taught by Latifa's Nii-chan and it was absolutely delicious! Your Nii-chan is amazing!」

Later, Arslan-kun also told me so.
Now, I'm, really, happy-desu[3].

Notes

1. TL : joking a bit here, she said "my faction"
2. ED*: Said in English
3. TL : And I'm developed a LOLIPHOBIA after translating this chapter; ED: No more……; PF:sounds terrifying

Latifa Side Story

Part 5

I did it.
I really did it!
Onii-chan has become a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami.
That means Onii-chan can freely live in the village.

A few days ago, Onii-chan and I, together with a few others headed to the Great Tree.
We had the Quasi-High Spirit called Dryad-sama residing in the great tree examine the spirit lying dormant within Onii-chan.
Dryad-sama said that a Quasi-high Spirit like herself was sleeping inside Onii-chan's body.
I simply thought Onii-chan was amazing as usual but apparently everyone else there were deeply shocked.
Even Dryad-sama was surprised.

Afterwards, I spoke briefly with Dryad-sama.
Oddly enough, Dryad took a liking to me and hugged me to the point where I was almost crushed.
When I asked whether I'd also be able to contract a spirit—

「I'm sure you will be able to contract a wonderful spirit.」

Was what she said.
It'd be great if I can.

Apart from that, as of the present, Onii-chan is the sole being to possess a spirit contract with a Quasi-High Spirit.
For the Seirei no Tami who revere spirits, there's no way they can leave such an important person alone.
It's decided accordingly to have Onii-chan officially become a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami.
A grand announcement to the whole village about Onii-chan

possessing a spirit contract with a Quasi-High Spirit will be done during the Spirit Festival.

Contrary to my expectations, the Spirit Festival is not a rowdy event but rather a solemn and awe-inspiring ceremony.
When the head elder, Syldra-sama, begins reciting a prayer to the spirits, Sara-Onee-chan, Oufia-Onee-chan, and Alma-Onee-chan, dressed in ceremonial garbs, also begin to dance.

「Beautiful…」

My thoughts unintentionally slip out of my mouth. The Onee-chans are truly dazzling.
Onii-chan's also sincerely watching their performance.

As the festival progresses onward, the blessings ceremony is next.
It's a ceremony where we receive the spirits' blessings from Dryad-sama.
It is said that those who receive Dryad-sama's blessing will be loved by the spirits and live a healthy and long life.
Along with Bella-chan and Arslan-kun, I'm also to receive Dryad-sama's blessing.
The children of the Seirei no Tami are called by name one at a time and given a brief introduction by the head elder. They then receive a blessing kiss from Dryad-sama.
The children's bodies faintly shine upon receiving the kiss as proof of having received the blessing.
I'm told that the blessing increases one's total Odo capacity and makes it easier for them to wield Spirit Arts.
I'm extremely grateful since I've only recently been able to use Spirit Arts.

I nervously continue spectating the ceremony.
So far, only my friends have received the blessing.
When Bella-chan's name is called, she falls over while on the stage generating laughter from the audience.
As for Arslan-kun and the other boys, they all blushed upon receiving the kiss from Dryad-sama.
Later, when I teased them about it, they all stubbornly insisted it wasn't like that, but it was obvious they were charmed by Dryad-

sama.
Finally, it's my turn.
I, who only recently joined the Seirei no Tami, am called last and introduced.
I'm also extremely nervous so I can't fault Bella-chan for falling over.
With awkward steps, I ascend the stage and approach Dryad-sama.

（Uwaa, as I thought, she's incredibly beautiful…）

Truly, Dryad-sama is a gorgeous woman, exactly like a goddess.
With this level of beauty, it's no wonder Arslan-kun and the others blushed.
Dryad-sama's beautiful face is reflected in my eyes as she gently kisses my forehead.
My body is enveloped in a warm, pale light.

「Congratulations, Latifa. You have now also received the spirits' divine protection.」

Dryad-sama tells me with a gentle smile—

「Tha— Thank you very much.」

I nervously convey my gratitude.
When I descend from the stage with my head lowered, Syldra-sama begins to introduce Onii-chan.
I, in my excitement, don't really pay attention to what he's saying, but I know that he's praising Onii-chan.
I feel proud that Onii-chan is noticed by everyone.
It's also largely thanks to Onii-chan having a Quasi-High Spirit residing within him.
According to Arthura-san, if not for the Quasi-High spirit, it would be difficult for Onii-chan to become a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami.
I get a bit angry seeing Dryad-sama kiss Onii-chan on the forehead but endure it since it's for our benefit.
When the blessing ends, a grand applause erupts from the audience welcoming Onii-chan as a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami.

「Now then, the ceremony has ended! Let the party, commence! Everybody, back to your preparations!」

Dominique-sama of the Elder Dwarf tribe cries out in a loud voice.
At his words, the atmosphere becomes rowdy in an instant.
When I move my eyes to over to Onii-chan, I see him talking with Syldra-sama.

「Latifa.」

I'm called out to by the Onee-chans as I'm watching Onii-chan and Syldra-sama converse.

「Ah, Onee-chans! You were all so pretty! You're even more beautiful up close!」

I immediately praise them.
I mean, they are absolutely beautiful.

「Thank you so much. By the way Latifa, there's something we want to consult you about…」

The Onee-chans speak to me with wistful expressions as I listen in anticipation.
Even though I consulted the Onee-chans a countless number of times before, they have never came to me for anything.

「Leave it to me!」

Therefore, I gladly agree to their request.

「Actually—」

Listening to the Onee-chans' story, I realize it is something I want to fulfill by all means possible.
They want to deepen their friendship with Onii-chan.
The reason is that they feel like they're being actively avoided by Onii-chan.
I think I understand why.

Onii-chan isn't a talkative person and neither does he go out of his way to associate himself with others.
I don't really understand why.
Perhaps there isn't a reason and that's just how he is.
However, I think Onii-chan's susceptible to the distance between

himself and others.

But, I understand Onii-chan.
Onii-chan cares for others in a variety of ways and constantly pays attention to their needs.
I understand that.
Onii-chan is always ready to help those who go astray after all.
I mean, even towards myself, who initially attempted to take his life, Onii-chan accepted my request. If one gathers their courage to ask, without a doubt Onii-chan will listen.

That's why, I agree to show the Onee-chans how they can capture Onii-chan.
The plan will be executed during the feast.
I've also persuaded Dominique-sama and Arthura-san over to my side beforehand.
Overhearing my plan, Dryad-sama also found it interesting and will be observing from the sidelines.

「Wi— Will this really be okay?」
「Just remembering it makes me awfully nervous…」

Recalling my plan, Sara-Onee-chan and Alma-Onee-chan mutter under their breaths.
The two seem hesitant to execute my plan in their present states.
As for Oufa-Onee-chan—

「U~n, then, why don't you loosen up a bit with some alcohol before approaching Rio-sama?」

Oufia-Onee-chan has a dazzling smile as she voices her suggestion.
Un, among the three, Oufia-Onee-chan probably possesses the best qualities to get along with Onii-chan.

「Uuu, certainly… that's the only way…」

Although Sara-Onee-chan's voice falters, it seem that they finally decide to borrow the power of liquor-sama.

「Gahaha, then let's start by exchanging a cup with me.」

Dominique-sama heads over to Onii-chan with several bottles of

liquor.
Onii-chan unexpectedly turns out to be a heavy drinker. He's taken an interest in the liquor offered to him and is eagerly chatting with Dominique-san.
In the meantime, the Onee-chans are lifting their spirits with the village's finest and strongest liquor, Spirit Liquor.
The effects of the liquor are probably accelerated by the atmosphere.
I also drink the Spirit Liquor; the taste is far superior to any juice I've ever had before. I feel so happy~

「Things have finally become a bit more interesting hasn't it? I should head over soon.」

Uttering that in a cheerful voice, Dryad-sama starts making her way towards Onii-chan.

「Ehehe, wish jyish we'll become ewen closher with Rio-shyama[11]!」

Somehow, Oufia-Onee-chan has become the liquor's first victim.

「Yosh! Then Oufia-Onee-chan will be the vanguard! Charge!」

I push Oufia-Onee-chan's back and guide her towards Onii-chan.
Oufia-Onee-chan's quite bold; she's snuggling up against Onii-chan.
Nevertheless, she's faithfully following the plan I proposed.
That's right, the secret to befriending Onii-chan is to act spoiled before him[12].
Oufia-Onee-chan switches places with Dominique-san and Dryad-san as the latter two flee from the scene.

「It seems like everything is proceeding as planned!」

I declare so while observing Oufia-Onee-chan sticking closely to Onii-chan.

「I— Is it really?」

The bewildered Sara-Onee-chan throws a retort at my confident declaration.
Good grief, Sara-Onee-chan is too shy.

「If Sara-Onee-chan doesn't go now, the plan will fail! Now, go!」

I urge Sara-Onee-chan onto her feet and direct her towards Onii-chan.
As expected, Sara-Onee-chan accepts her fate and quickly takes a seat beside Onii-chan.
I wonder if her red face is because of the Spirit Liquor.

「We're the only ones left! Let's go! Alma-Onee-chan!」
「But, I'm not drunk yet…」

Taking Alma-Onee-chan along who's a heavy drinker, we also join in on the fun.
I sneak around behind Onii-chan and hug him.

「Muu~ Oufia-Onee-chan and Sara-Onee-chan are so cunning!」

Being clung onto suddenly, Onii-chan slightly stiffens but he relaxes immediately after realising it's me.
It's a pleasant feeling so I cling onto Onii-chan even more firmly.
Alma-Onee-chan arrives slightly slower than I did and us five begin to drink.
The conversation livens up little by little and the Onee-chans finally confess their intention to befriend Onii-chan.
Onii-chan is a little taken aback at first, but after listening to their request, he accepts their feelings with a gentle laugh.

「Fufu, at last everybody's become close friends!」

I proudly exclaim so while clinging onto Onii-chan.

「Gahaha. Looks like it was a success. Look, I've brought you guys some food and liquor. You can further deepen your friendship over these.」

Dominique-sama and Arthura-sama brings over a large amount of food and liquor to us.
The two also join us in drinking.

And then, Dominique-sama begins proposing marriage candidates to Onii-chan for some reason.
The totally wasted Sara-Onee-chan and Alma-Onee-chan don't give

any visible reactions.
On the other hand, I'm not sure if Oufia-Onee-chan's serious about her statement[3].
As for me, I want to marry Onii-chan if possible.
Indeed, I'm content with only dreaming about it but I still truly want to propose to him.
Even if I'm rejected, I still want to be together with Onii-chan forever.
That's why—.

「Un!」

Borrowing the power of liquor, I exclaim so.
Onii-chan will probably take my proclamation as a joke but I'm serious.

I never knew liquor could be this good and become helplessly drunk in no time. I can't help but feel extremely happy.
The others have become totally wasted as well, leaving only Onii-chan and Arthura-san remaining sober.
Syldra-sama and Dominique-sama who were drinking elsewhere also join us and continue drinking with Onii-chan.
The next day, I experience a slight hangover but Onii-chan cures me using Spirit Arts. Being the first time a long time that it's only the two of us, we decide to go for a stroll for the day.
I'm still very much affected by yesterday's atmosphere and energetically talk about various things with Onii-chan.

「It's already been over a year since we've arrived in this village, how are you finding it? Are you happy living here?」

Onii-chan, who has been attentively listening to me, suddenly asks me such a question.

「Un! It's just like Onii-chan had said, life here is really fun and everyone's extremely nice to me!」

I mean—
There's Onii-chan.
There's the Onee-chans.
There are my friends.
There are a lot of kind grown-ups.

In a place overflowing with joy and compassion, there's no way I can't be happy.

「I see, by the way Latifa, is it fine if we talk for a bit?」

For some reason Onii-chan's tone becomes formal.

「E~tto, about what?」

An unpleasant premonition builds up within me.

「I intend on leaving this village soon.」

My feelings are on point—

「!!!…」

Twitch My body trembles.
Those are the words I've been expecting for a long time and I've been trying my hardest to prevent them from ever being said. When Onii-chan finally became a sworn friend of the Seirei no Tami, a shred of hope that he'd remain in the village appeared—
And yet, Onii-chan still wants to leave the village.
It must be a lie, why would he want to?
Aren't all the barriers preventing him from staying already gone?
My head becomes blank in an instant.
My beloved Onii-chan is saying something but his words don't make it to me.
No.

「…no.」

NO.
I don't want that.

「…NO! I ABSOLUTELY DON'T WANT THAT[14]!」

Before I realise it, I'm screaming at the top of my lungs.

「Latifa…」

Not wanting to let the troubled looking Onii-chan go, I desperately cling onto him.

No.
I don't want that.
Am I going to be abandoned?
Am I going to become an unneeded child[5]?

「Why are you leaving!? Are you going back to the humans? Didn't you put so much effort into becoming friends with the Onee-chans? Isn't it fine to stay in the village!?」

Countless questions arise as the words pour out of my mouth.

「I'll have to cross many mountains but… There are things I must do away from here.」

Things he had to do?
Like what?
I don't know.
I really don't know.
I desperately try to think of what kind of tasks Onii-chan has to do.
But, I really have no clue.
Why?

「Why… are you leaving me…?」

The moment I say that, I realise something, although it may already be too late.
I really don't know anything about Onii-chan.
Truly, right now, for the first time, I notice that I've always pushed my desires onto Onii-chan and never once took his feelings into account.
So it's only natural that I don't know anything about Onii-chan's ambitions.

「Come to think of it, I never told Latifa why I was heading east.」

I fall into self-loathing as Onii-chan tells me about his reasons.
Apparently, Onii-chan's parents passed away so he wants to erect a grave for them in their hometown.
After hearing Onii-chan's reason, I can't bear to listen to him any longer.
The reason is simple.
I'm horribly afraid of Onii-chan disappearing so I'm trying to derail

the topic.
Ha, ha…
Even though Onii-chan's still in front of me, it already feels like he's in a distant place.

「Besides… what is it?」

Onii-chan starts to say something but hesitates causing me to fearfully wait for his next words.

「No, it's nothing.」

Onii-chan discards what he's about to say with a dry laugh.
Is it really nothing?
I want to know.
But, have I already missed my chance to ask?
For me, who's been dodging the topic for all this time, only to ask when he's about to disappear.
Isn't that… a little too convenient?

If it was the me from before, I would immediately demand to hear Onii-chan's circumstances.
However, now that I'm able to look back at my old self, a sense of guilt wells up within me.
I blindly depended on and took advantage of Onii-chan's gentle nature without ever trying to understand him.
Aah, it was such a delicious temptation.
Until now I was comfortably immersed in his kindness so it was only natural.
But I'm irresponsible so perhaps I shouldn't properly face Onii-chan.
No, I'd be abusing Onii-chan's kindness. I can't do such a shameless thing after having already heard Onii-chan's circumstances.
I can't bring myself to do that because I truly love Onii-chan.
Those are my thoughts.

「…I don't really know anything about Onii-chan.」

I harbour a secret that I've never revealed to anybody, including Onii-chan.
I haven't told Onii-chan so I wouldn't have to face him.
But, I'm a coward-desu.

I only observe people's exterior[161] in fear of coming into contact with their malice.
To me, the gentle Onii-chan is my sole pillar of support.
That's why I hesitated to tell Onii-chan.
It's terrifying to even take a single step forward.
But, now is the time to speak.
The person in front of me is the one who's given me the courage to do so.

「Uhm you see, there's something I want to tell Onii-chan. It might be a bit sudden… maybe, how should I say it, Onii-chan might not believe me…」

For that reason, I will tell him.
The truth about me.

「You see, does Onii-chan believe in the existence of a previous life?」

No matter what kind of reply he gives me, I will accept it.
That's right, I make up my mind to tell Onii-chan that I'm a reincarnator.

「You know I, I already died once. I was originally a human. And, I was reincarnated as the person I am today… Etto, I know it's hard to believe but…」

However, because I didn't prepare myself beforehand, I end up having difficulty conveying such an absurd story.
In the middle of my incoherent explanation—

「…I know.」

For some reason, words I never expected come out from Onii-chan's mouth.

「—Eh?」

It takes a few seconds before I can make sense of his words.

「Latifa originally lived in Japan right?」

And yet, Onii-chan calmly continues to speak.

「H— How…」

I'm barely able to force out those words as my mind is in turmoil.

「*That's because I was also a Japanese you know*[171].」

In astonishment, those nostalgic words resounds in my ear.

「Japanese… language… Japanese… person… Onii-chan is a Japanese?」

Onii-chan is a Japanese person.
That's what he said… right?

「That is so. Well "was" to be exact.」

In other words, he's a reincarnator just like me.
Onii-chan was a formerly a Japanese like me…

「You knew, you knew, yet… you kept silent?」

I ask the question that arises in my head in bewilderment.
In response to my accusation, Onii-chan slowly starts explaining how he noticed I'm a reincarnator.
But, why didn't he tell me before?
Why wouldn't he tell me?

「W— Why!? Why didn't you say anything!?」

I unintentionally let my anger take over.
No that's wrong, I'm genuinely angry.
For the first time, I'm angry at Onii-chan.

「Why? Why were we reincarnated? Why have we retained our memories? I too, have long brooded over these questions. I spent a lot of time wondering why. But you know, aren't they just memories of our former life? We've already become inhabitants of this world. Even if there is a way back, we no longer have a place in our former world.」

However, Onii-chan brushes off my brash attitude and calmly continues his explanation.
Onii-chan's words "we no longer have a place in our former world"

ruthlessly devastates my heart.
Even if I were to return today, to Otou-san, to Okaa-san, to Onii-san, to my friends, I'd just be a stranger.
Even if my current self is a mix between Latifa and Endou Suzune, Endou Suzune no longer exists.
The girl called Endou Suzune back on Earth has already died.
I… already understood that from the beginning.
Thinking about it carefully, maybe, if I, in my fragile state when I just met Onii-chan, was told that he was a former Japanese, I would not have been able to reflect upon myself and forever relied on Onii-chan.
I would have unleashed all the anguish I harboured against being reincarnated at Onii-chan and died a broken person.

Thankfully, Onii-chan had provided many hints about him being a reincarnator and prepared me for this moment.
Onii-chan waited for me to recover until I was comfortable enough to bring up the topic about reincarnation myself.
Furthermore, he noticed that I became overly dependent on him due to my bleak outlook on life at the time.
In the end, my view on life remained restricted until today but my heart has healed considerably.
While I'm still shocked that Onii-chan was a Japanese, thanks to that, I no longer intend on depending on Onii-chan.
Geez, for me, Onii-chan's still Onii-chan after all.

I only chose whether to keep on depending on Onii-chan or not.
If I chose to keep on relying on Onii-chan, my heart would break once again when I'm separated from him.
I predict such a future in my mind.

Ha, haha…
Onii-chan's amazing.
I'm an idiot to have gotten angry at Onii-chan.
Still, a part of me wishes that Onii-chan had told me sooner.
I mean, even if I chose the path of remaining a broken being dependent on Onii-chan, I'm sure he'd still accept me.
However, when I'm reminded of the pain of waiting for my heart to be healed, my anger vanishes.

But, it’s unfair.
Onii-chan is purposely making himself out to be a selfish, self-centered hypocrite to make me hate him.
Onii-chan’s trying to push me away because if he continues accommodating me, I’ll remain dependent on him and my heart will deteriorate.
I think Onii-chan wants me to become independent.
Having realised Onii-chan intentions, how can I possibly remain dependent any longer?
Even if I become lonely, I want to show Onii-chan that I can become independent.

Just don’t say it.
Please don’t say you hate me just to get your point across.
You don’t need to say such a thing.
I know Onii-chan is truly a kindhearted person, that’s why although I’m a bit worried, I can become independent.
Why wasn’t I able to notice that before?
It’s because I was a coward.

To me Onii-chan is kind, gentle, uh it’s a bit vague but—
I mean Onii-chan is truly a gentle and compassionate person.
He doesn’t only worry about me on the surface, but is also conscious about my emotional well-being.
He notices and acknowledges my courage.

And yet, I became suspicious of him because I was afraid of humanity’s corrupt desires.
You could argue that I was under the collar’s control but it doesn’t change the fact that I’ve killed people with these hands.
I even tried to kill Onii-chan.
Calling myself lovable would be unthinkable.
To such a dirty me—
The one who extended a hand to pull me from the ruins, was this person.

Now, I will no longer remain dependent. I will lead my own life for this person’s sake.
Therefore, let’s convey these feelings to him.
What I’m thinking, what I’m feeling, and what you gave me.

So, let's tell him.

「Is it fine for me to continue calling you Onii-chan?」

Please, allow me to remain as your Imouto.

「…Of course, even if I leave the Seirei no Tami village, Latifa will always remain my Imouto.」

Such an answer is conveyed to me—
Truly—
I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

「Onii-chan!」

Notes

1. Translation: Ehehe, with this we will become even closer with Rio-sama

2. TL: -_-, EH, isn't that only happened since you're a kid? Latifa?; ED: …I have no words for this; PF: With Rio i think it would end up the same as long as it doesn't look unnatural

3. ED: If you don't remember, she proposes to become Rio's wife when Alma evades the question

4. ED: Calm down you hysterical child; TL: Calm down Vrryou-san

5. ED: Definitely unneeded; TL : don't worry, just 1 more part and you can kiss a goodbye to Latifa[temp]

6. TL: the raw says "only look at their eyes"

7. TL: Spoken in Japanese

Latifa Side Story

Part 6

The day after the Spirit Festival.
It was a day of great importance for both, myself as Latifa, and myself as Endou Suzune.
It's a day that I'll continue to hold dear to me for the rest of my life.
I will recount the events that transpired on that day.

First and foremost, I am determined to see off Onii-chan. I've decided to not depend on Onii-chan any longer.
Well, as for acting like a spoiled Imouto… that's another story.
I mean, Onii-chan even formally acknowledged me as his Imouto.
So that's my special privilege as Onii-chan's Imouto.
Thus, exercising my rights as Onii-chan's Imouto, I asked him about his previous life.
In doing so, I can fall deeper in love with Onii-chan.
In this manner, even when Onii-chan's away, I can always feel his presence by my side.
These were my thoughts.

And so, Onii-chan recounted stories from his previous life, from his infancy up to his life as a University student.
There was one person who kept coming up in his stories. This person played a significant role in shaping Onii-chan's former life.
That person was a girl, Onii-chan's childhood friend.
Was she such an important existence in Onii-chan's past life? A bitter feeling rose from within me.
To be honest, I'm incredibly jealous of her.
I mean, I'm sure that even now, Onii-chan still thinks about her.
It's been at least 20 years if counting both Onii-chan's former and current life and yet, Onii-chan still exhibits lingering affection for her.
It's an unrequited love lasting for over 20 years that Onii-chan continues to pursue.

I think Onii-chan's an exceptionally dedicated person.

To cherish the memories from their childhood—
For years, even decades, not being able to meet—
It's not even known if they can ever see each other again—
Even so, for all this time, even now, he keeps thinking about her.
Onii-chan's feelings, is it love? Passion? Regret? It's a kind of feeling that I can't express in words.

I understand Onii-chan's feelings yet, is it possible for him to look at me?
I really wish Onii-chan would notice me.
Even just a little, to see the feelings I hold.
You might say that my first love was the Onii-san who helped me on the bus in my previous life.
However, for the current me, Onii-chan is a much more important existence than that Onii-san.
I've decided to devote my entire life to Onii-chan.
That's how strong my feelings for Onii-chan are.

Looking back, my feelings for Onii-san came from my admiration.
On the other hand, Onii-chan isn't just a figure I admire, but just by being there, he provides me with a sense of security.
With just those feelings, is it enough for him to look at me?
Or must I give up?
So I'm to just give up?

…No.
Definitely not.
It's fine even if my feelings never reach him.
Even if Onii-chan comes to love somebody else, I may find it unpleasant but I will tolerate it.
Nevertheless, even so, as long as even the slightest glimmer of hope exists—
For as long as Onii-chan allows me to, I will stay by his side.
And then, surely one day, I will have Onii-chan notice me[11].
Although we will be separated when Onii-chan resumes his journey, I can now confidently say that we will always be together.
Therefore, I believe that Onii-chan will return to me.

But the story doesn't end there—
What happens next, could it be called a miracle?
Or, fate perhaps?

「Uhm, how did Onii-chan die?」

I seized the opportunity to bring up the question, even though it is a slightly sensitive topic.

「It seemed like the bus I took home from University got into an accident. I lost consciousness in an instant and the next thing I knew, I was an orphan in this world.」

As if implying that it wasn't a topic worth mentioning, Onii-chan floats a wry smile.
I, on the other hand, was quite shocked.

「E~tto, I also died after the bus I took got into an accident.」

That's right, just like Onii-chan, I also died in a traffic accident on a bus.
Moreover, just like me, Onii-chan also lived in Tokyo.
I— It couldn't be—
Dokun, my heartbeat quickens.

「Is that so? Come to think of it, you told me you also lived in Tokyo…」

Onii-chan seemed to have also caught onto the same train of thought as me.
In a frenzied voice, I name the place where I lived and describe the bus I got on to Onii-chan.

「…It's possible that we got on the same bus. If that's the case then that girl is…」

That means, there was a very high chance that Onii-chan and I got on the same bus and died in the same accident.
Although Onii-chan mutters something, I don't pay attention.
I mean, since we got on the same bus—
At that time, other than the bus driver, there was only one other male onboard—

What's more is that Onii-chan was a University student—
Then, in other words—

Wha— What should I do?
When I understand what happened back then, my mind becomes blank.
Just now, I was able to arrange my thoughts and arrived at a shocking conclusion: Onii-chan is the Onii-san whom I first fell in love with. When I realise that—
My heart suddenly begins to beat wildly.

No wonder my heart felt at ease whenever I thought about Onii-chan.
However, at the same time, now when I think of Onii-chan, I become terribly nervous and my face turns bright red.
I can't bear to face Onii-chan anymore.
The feeling of wanting Onii-chan to see me as a woman has become much stronger.
I wonder what the true nature of this feeling is.

Before I knew that Onii-chan and Onii-san were one and the same, I suppressed the recognition of such a desire. Even if my feelings never reached him, I intended to devote myself to Onii-chan—
However, now I can no longer suppress the beating in my chest, the irresistible yearning for Onii-chan.
Most of the feelings I held for Onii-chan before were that of love. The contents of my feelings now have not changed but my affection towards Onii-chan has increased dramatically.
I'm really just a simple, self-centered person.
My feelings for Onii-chan and my feelings for Onii-san.
With both feelings combined, my love for Onii-chan has grown greater than ever.

Is it because I found out that Onii-san reincarnated and is alive?
Or is it because I found out that Onii-chan is Onii-san?
What if Onii-san reincarnated as somebody else? If Onii-san were to appear somewhere else in the future, what would I think of him?
When I ponder such a thought, I realise it's a pointless worry.
I mean, even if I don't worry about it, it was Onii-san who helped me as Onii-chan.

There's no need to think about it too deeply.
The Onii-chan who helped me is that Onii-san after all. The Onii-chan I came to love is that same Onii-san.

In other words, I fell in love with the same person twice[2].
There doesn't exist any other person who carries the love for two persons for one person.
I consider it a very special luxury for myself, a truly wondrous happening.
Although the two outwardly look different, they are the same existence—
Even if we were both reborn, even if Onii-chan's appearance changed, I think I was fated to love Onii-chan.
It was inevitable that I would fall for him.
That's why there's no need to continue maintaining this boorish conjecture of a story.

「Uhm you know, Onii-chan…」

I decide to tell Onii-chan.
That I was saved by Onii-chan in my previous life.
When I'm about to tell him my feelings, Onii-chan smiles at me gently and pats my head.

It seems that there's no need for me to speak because Onii-chan likely already understands me[3].
I don't need to verbally express my love for Onii-chan.
The current me is not yet a suitable partner for Onii-chan.
That's why, so that Onii-chan will look my way, I must continue to do my best.
And one day, I will make Onii-chan look at me.
That was my goal.

For that reason, I think you understand why I hold the day after the Spirit Festival very dear to me.

I returned home after talking to Onii-chan about various things and briefly told Arthura-san everything that happened.
Arthura-san was extremely grateful towards Onii-chan and thanked him repeatedly.

At that time, I didn't really understand her behaviour.
Certainly Arthura-san loves me as if I was her own grandchild.
However, the Arthura-san of that time displayed deep, compassionate emotions that couldn't be explained.

A few days later however, I came to learn of the reason.
Arthura-san was my mother's grandmother.
In other words, she's my great-grandmother.
When I heard the story, I realised I had blood relatives who sincerely love and care for me besides mother. It made me truly happy from the bottom of my heart and I couldn't help but shed tears of joy.
Afterwards, I decided to call Arthura-san, Arthura-Obaa-chan.

Onii-chan, Arthura-Obaa-chan, the Onee-chans, and all of my friends.
There are a lot of people who care for me around me.
The days I spent with them were exceedingly happy and the days passed surprisingly quickly.

Onii-chan, the Onee-chans, and all my friends went on picnics.
We were taught martial arts by Onii-chan alongside the Seirei no Tami warriors.
The number of people who attended Onii-chan's cooking lessons increased to the point where Onii-chan had to hold more sessions.
For some reason, Arslan-kun declared Onii-chan to be his rival[141].
And then, there was our second Spirit Festival.
I became dead drunk by the end just like before.
I behaved like a spoiled child to Onii-chan for the entirety of the next day.
Really, a lot of things happened—
And so, at long last, the day when Onii-chan was to leave the village arrived.

I was sad but—
Even then, I was able to properly see him off with a smile.
And bid him farewell.
By the way, it seemed like Onii-chan received various forms of aid from the village Elders before he left.
Something like amazing magic tools, amazing armour, an amazing amount of food and medicine, and a variety of other things. Onii-

chan was deeply grateful for the Elders' assistance.

Many of the Seirei no Tami came to see off Onii-chan.
There were many misconceptions about Onii-chan when we first arrived in the village. However, Onii-chan is a welcomed member of the village now. The scene before me is a testimony to that.
That's why,Onii-chan.
Please know that you're always welcome here.
I am— No, not just me, everyone is waiting for you to return.
Take care.

「He's gone…」

After seeing Onii-chan's flying figure disappear over the horizon, I mutter in a daze.
Even if I prepared my heart, I can't help but still feel lonely.
How long will it be until Onii-chan returns?
Thinking about the amount of time I'll have to wait, tears fall from my eyes.

「Apart from the aid he received as a Sworn Friend, I personally bestowed Rio-dono a gift. It's for the sake of Rio-dono and Latifa.」

To my currently disheartened self, Arthura-Obaa-chan spoke to me softly.

「For our sake?」

I questioningly look up at Arthura-Obaa-chan.
What on earth could it be?

「It's a magic tool called the Transfer Crystal. It's an amazing item that will allow one to return to the village in an instant if used.」

Wow, Arthura-Obaa-chan gave Onii-chan a magic tool that enables spatial relocation in an instant.
That's incredible!
In that case, can't he return here every day?
When I voice my question, I'm unfortunately told that it isn't such a convenient tool.

To use it, you must first designate a point of origin as the target

destination.
After designating the point of origin, when one uses the Transfer Crystal, the user's current location is spatially connected to the point of origin.
However, the reverse isn't possible.
Once the user returns to the point of origin, the spatial connection is severed and the user will have to return to his or her former location using conventional means.
Furthermore, depending on the distance from the user's location to the point of origin, a significant amount of Odo in the Transfer Crystal can be consumed.
Still, as long as the Odo is replenished, the tool can be used as many times as one likes. In the end, it's still an amazing magic tool.
Unfortunately, it's a very valuable magic tool that cannot be mass produced.
The point of origin of the Transfer Crystal given to Onii-chan is set to the Seirei no Tami village.
I can meet Onii-chan earlier only when he intends to return.
Thank you, Arthura-Obaa-chan.

Once more, I look up at the sky in the direction where Onii-chan disappeared.
The next time we meet, he will see me grown into a splendid adult.
That is my will.

Notes

1. ED: But ~~Senpai~~ Onii-chan will never notice you
2. ED: And he didn't look at you… twice
3. TL : As his imouto of course
4. TL : Did we just get a female version of Ichika? PF: If you mean a more capable one then maybe

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Main Characters

Amakawa Haruto / Rio
Age: 20 (at time of death) / 7 ~ 12

A mysterious orphaned child living in the slums of the Bertram Kingdom capital. He was the reincarnation of Amakawa Haruto [20 years old] who died due to an unfortunate accident in Japan. His most striking feature is his black hair which is extremely rare among the population making him the distinguishable amongst the orphans. His other features are his androgynous looks which was a combination of his features from his previous and current life. His has an unknown past, but swore to take a revenge to his mother's murderer. His fate changed drastically after he awakened to his previous life's memories as Amakawa Haruto. Their personalities merged into one with Haruto and Rio sharing control over the body and mind. Afterwards he saved two princesses of the Bertram Kingdom on an impulse only to get himself involved in their political disputes. As a reward he was allowed to enrol in the Bertram

Kingdom Royal Institute. Later, due to false accusation, he became a fugitive before graduation. Now he embarked on a journey to his parents' home town in the Yagumo area.

Abilities :

- Ancient martial arts (from previous life)
- Swordsmanship
- Language comprehension (from Rio)
- Common knowledge (from previous life)
- Tea brewing (trained by Seria)
- Cooking (average knowledge in Chinese, Western, and Italian cuisine)
- Magic (fake; gained by mimicking the principle of the magic since he never succeeded in the Contract Ceremony)
- Magic (White/All-rounder Type)

Mysterious Childhood Sweetheart

Age: ???

Amakawa Haruto's [unrequited] childhood sweetheart. She mysteriously disappeared soon after their high-school entrance ceremony and devastated Haruto. He's always regretted not confessing his feelings to her… even until now.

Flora (Left)

Age: 6 ~ 11

Second princess of the Bertram Kingdom and younger sister of Christina. She and her sister were kidnapped by some thugs but were saved by Rio. She's kind by nature, thus loved by the people. She's also the only one who stood up for Rio when he was falsely accused. She shares the same violet coloured hair as her older sister. Enrolled in the Royal Institute as Rio's kouhai.

Abilities :

- Common knowledge
- Magic
- Kind-hearted
- ~~A loli~~

Christina (Right)

Age: 7 ~ 12

First princess of the Bertram Kingdom and older sister of Flora. She slapped Rio right after he saved her. Despite her fiery personality [which is more abated later], she dotes on her little sister and she's the type of person who would abandon 1 person for the benefit of many, as seen during the false accusation incident despite knowing that Rio was innocent. That way of thinking showed how she prioritized the Kingdom's well being. She's more mature and stout hearted than her sister. She shares the same violet coloured hair as her sister. Enrolled in the same class as Rio in Royal Institute.

Abilities :

- Royal knowledge
- Royal family disposition
- Magic

- Common knowledge
- Strict sister
- Doting sister
- Most disliked female character (somehow I know that even without poll)

Seria Claire (or Celia)

Age: 12 ~ 17

The youngest lecturer in the history of the Royal Institute. Hailed as a genius during her youth, she skipped multiple grades and became a professor at the tender age of 12. The only person in the Institute to acknowledge Rio, is his frequent conversation partner and she also taught him how to read. Rio later assisted her in her research as well as everyday chores (tidying up after her). She retains a youthful appearance despite her age (loli) due to her immense magical powers. Unbeknownst to Rio, she developed some feelings towards him during their time together. Her most striking features are her child-like appearance and long white hair.

Abilities :

- Forever 17 (given by Rio, though it was due to her immense magical powers)
- Magic (White/All-rounder type)
- Still a loli

Side Characters

Roana Fontin

Daughter of Duke Fontin, she and Christina are the two class representatives in Rio's class. Like Christina, she is also aware of Rio's innocence but also chose to ignore it. A perfect example of an ojou-sama. Enrolled in the same class as Rio in Royal Institute.

King Phillip III

The father of Flora and Christina and the current King of the Bertram Kingdom. He knew about Helmut's ambitions since his father's reign but couldn't do anything at the time since he was still on the Crown Prince. A just ruler and doting father, like his daughter Christina, he chose to abandon Rio to prevent a civil war despite knowing Rio was innocent. Currently waiting for the chance to punish the perpetrator of his daughters' kidnapping.

Alfred Emal

The second son of the Emal house. He works as the Imperial Guards' Deputy Commander protecting royalty and the court. His past… has unknown connections with Rio.

Helmut Albo

Commander of the Imperial Guards. He built his career from scratch acting as a loyal knight of the Kingdom. However his true intentions are to become Field Marshal and to use his influence to usurp the King's powers giving him control over the Kingdom.

Duke Euguno

A highly influential noble belonging to King Philip III's faction. In contrast to his honourable outward appearance, he is willing to resort to any kind of underhand tactics to achieve his goals.

Steed Euguno

Egoistic and immature child of Duke Euguno. Makes up for his lack of ability by abusing his father's authority.

Alphonse Rodan

Some guy. Currently counting down the days until the end of his life.

Galucia

Head master of the Royal Institute.

Terms & Definitions

Odo (オド)

The life force existing in all living beings, similar to Ki. Once mastered, it can be controlled through one's will. This is the true form of what magicians call magical power. Mastering it will allow spirit art users to freely manipulate mana.

Mana (マナ)

Something that exists in nature. The Serei no Tami refer to it as "Force of Nature". Usually, it cannot be seen by the naked eye except by those who mastered the perception and control over their odo. Many magicians mistake mana as their own odo. Mana is the first step for a spirit to come into existence (which has vague self-consciousness). The mana phenomenon (magic phenomenon) occurs when an image is transmitted to it via oda. The image is prearranged (in the case of a magician) or self-arranged (in the case of a spirit).

Magic

The phenomenon created using a System Contract whose effects change in odo in accordance to the pre-arranged phenomenon carved in System Contract. For example, a system contract for fireball only enables the contractor to use fireball in the shape of a ball and no more than that.

Spirit Art

The phenomenon caused by the image of the user that is transmitted directly via their odo to mana in their surrounding without the assistance of System Contract. For example, when Arthura created fireball atop her finger, she changed its shape (it is not restricted to

any specific shape). On the other hand, magic can only produce it in the shape of a the System Contract and can never change unless a contract for a different shape is made.

Spirit

An existence that materializes into a being from the aggregation of mana and have their own will. Spirits can assist Spirit Art users to quicken the processing speed of their Spirit Art.

System Contract

Pre-arranged mana phenomenon that is carved onto the body of the contractor (usually a human).